

INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP - NEW BRIEFING

Congo: Solving the FDLR Problem Once and for All

Nairobi/Brussels, 12 May 2005: The FDLR (Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a menace to peace in the region, and concerned governments must work together to disarm them.

The Congo: Solving the FDLR Problem Once and for All,* the latest briefing from the International Crisis Group, examines the continued existence in the Congo of 8,000 to 10,000 FDLR troops, Hutu rebels with links to the 1994 genocide in their home country, Rwanda. Though too weak to threaten Kigali, and though many of its members are not themselves *genocidaires*, the FDLR remains a key source of regional instability.

"Rwanda and the Congo have not yet exhausted all peaceful means for the demobilisation of the FDLR", says Crisis Group Senior Analyst Jason K. Stearns. "New urgency is required from the Transitional Government in Kinshasa, Rwanda and the wider international community alike to solve the FDLR problem once and for all".

The FDLR's 31 March announcement in Rome that it intends to end military operations against Rwanda, disarm and return home voluntarily is, on the surface, a very significant development that would go far toward ending conflict in eastern Congo. With the Rome Declaration the FDLR and the Congolese Transitional Government even issued a timetable for demobilisation and repatriation.

However, if the details prove unacceptable to Rwanda, which was not at the Rome meeting, the initiative is unlikely to go further. FDLR leaders have little incentive to return to a country where some face prosecution for their role in the 1994 genocide and others would lose status and assets. If, as in the past, the FDLR sets political conditions on its return to Rwanda, the effort will simply be a non-starter.

The Rwandan government, which has consistently refused to meet the FDLR, should hold technical discussions with military commanders and be prepared to offer them concrete incentives for their return and resettlement. Meanwhile, the Kinshasa government should pressure the FDLR to drop any political aspirations. But if such peaceful avenues for disarming the FDLR are exhausted, the only solution left will be a military one.

The UN Mission in the Congo (MONUC) will not undertake this task. The Congolese army would ultimately have to do the job with UN and other international help in logistics and training. Although the army is not yet fully ready, it could make a beginning. While this would likely result in more displacement and deaths of civilians in the short run, letting the problem continue to fester is not an option: it could well provoke another crisis and an outbreak of more general fighting throughout the region.

"A fully peaceful solution would obviously be preferred, but we've got to prepare to act forcefully if necessary", says Crisis Group Senior Analyst Jim Terrie. "With

worldwide donors contributing over a billion U.S. dollars a year to the Congolese budget, the international community has the means and motive to be more active in addressing these issues before they explode".

Contacts: Andrew Stroehlein (Brussels) 32 (0) 485 555 946

Jennifer Leonard (Washington) 1 202 785 1601

To contact Crisis Group media please

<<http://www.icg.org/home/index.cfm?action=form%3D16%3D1>>click here

***Read the full Crisis Group report on our website:**

<http://www.crisisgroup.org>><http://www.crisisgroup.org>

To find out more, visit our "<[http://www.icg.org/ Conflict in the Congo](http://www.icg.org/Conflict%20in%20the%20Congo)>" page, which has links to Crisis Group's reports and opinion pieces on the conflict, details of our advocacy efforts to date, links to other resources, and information on what you can do to support Crisis Group's efforts.

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, multinational organisation covering over 50 crisis-affected countries and territories across four continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

The Congo: Solving the FDLR Problem Once and for All

OVERVIEW

The continued existence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo of 8,000 to 10,000 Hutu rebels with links to the 1994 genocide in their home country, Rwanda, is a key source of regional instability. Though too weak to imperil Rwanda's government, and though many of its members are not themselves *genocidaires*, the FDLR (Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda) gives Kigali justification for continued interference in the Congo and threats to invade. It remains a menace to Congolese and Rwandan civilians and a potential tool with which hardliners in Kinshasa could sabotage the Congo's fragile peace process. New urgency is required from the Transitional Government in Kinshasa, Rwanda and the wider international community alike to solve the FDLR problem once and for all -- non-violently if at all possible, but by military force (by the new Congolese army, with international support) if necessary.

On 31 March 2005 in Rome, representatives of the FDLR announced the movement was willing to cease military action against Rwanda and return home. This declaration followed negotiations with representatives of Congolese President Kabila, sponsored by the Community of Sant'Egidio, and appeared to present an opportunity to remove one of the main obstacles to peace and security in the Great Lakes. In the same declaration, the FDLR denounced the Rwandan genocide and committed to working with the instruments of international justice. More concretely, it stated that, provided it was assured of unspecified "measures of accompaniment", it would transform its struggle from a military to a political one; voluntarily demobilise and

repatriate its troops to Rwanda; and seek the repatriation of all Rwandan refugees. The FDLR and the Congolese Transitional Government issued a timetable that envisaged demobilisation would begin by early May 2005 and repatriation would be completed by the end of June.

There are serious reasons to doubt matters will go so smoothly. The Rwandan government, which was not at the Rome meeting, has always refused political negotiations with a group it, not unreasonably, considers to be criminal. FDLR leaders, who have had little incentive to go back to a country which some face imprisonment and others would lose status and assets, have in the past made return dependent on unrealistic conditions including opportunity for their movement to operate politically and for an Inter-Rwandan Dialogue between the ruling party in Kigali, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), and the opposition in exile. The Rome Declaration, which cited no conditions, looks like a step forward but the reference to unspecified "measures of accompaniment" and subsequent statements suggest troublesome conditions are likely to be forthcoming.

If peaceful avenues for disarming the FDLR are exhausted, the only solution left will be a military one. The UN Mission in the Congo (MONUC) will not undertake this task; the new Congolese army, which would ultimately have to do the job with UN and other international help in logistics and training, is not yet fully ready but it could make a beginning. While this would likely result in more displacement and deaths of innocent civilians, at least in the short run, letting the problem continue to fester is not an option: it could well provoke another crisis and an outbreak of more general fighting in the region. Much as he did in late 2004, Rwandan President Paul Kagame has recently renewed threats to invade the Congo again, and tensions in both countries have increased substantially.

To enhance the prospect of a non-violent solution, there are a number of steps that each of the relevant actors should take.

The Congolese Transitional Government should:

- pressure the FDLR to refrain from setting political conditions for a return to Rwanda and to follow through on its Rome Declaration commitments, including the repatriation timetable; and make plans to begin to use force to compel the FDLR to demobilise if diplomatic efforts fail.

The Rwandan government should seek to split more moderate FDLR commanders off from hardliners by:

- holding non-political, technical discussions with FDLR leaders about return modalities;
- providing monetary and other incentives for return, including an offer to integrate eligible commanders into its army; and
- identifying which commanders are, and which are not, sought by Rwandan courts for crimes of genocide and accepting an option of third-country asylum for those not sought for serious crimes by its own courts or the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda in Arusha.

MONUC should:

prepare to provide logistical support to the Congolese army in forceful disarmament of the FDLR should that prove necessary.

The African Union should:

- give active political support to efforts to achieve peaceful disarmament of the FDLR and some substance to its declared intention to establish a force to assist in forceful disarmament should that prove necessary; and support efforts to expand the international community's role in enhancing the capacity of the Congolese forces.
- The international donor community, including the international financial institutions, should: more closely condition its aid -- on which both the Congolese Transitional Government and the Rwandan government are heavily dependent -- to concrete measures to advance the Congo peace process, including a definitive solution to the FDLR problem.

Nairobi/Brussels, 12 May 2005