

African Union

Research Reports

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Forum: African Union

Issue: Addressing the Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis Occurring in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Introduction

The humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) represents one of the most complex and prolonged crises in the world today. Despite its vast natural resources, the DRC has faced conflict, poor governance, and a lack of infrastructure, leading to dire humanitarian conditions (Autesserre 2012). Consequences of the ongoing crisis include widespread displacement, food insecurity, and a breakdown of essential services, affecting millions of Congolese citizens (UNHCR). The roots of the current humanitarian crisis can be traced back to decades of conflict, beginning with the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, which spilled over into the DRC and ignited a series of wars and regional conflicts (Stearns 2011). This left the country fragmented, with over 120 armed groups operating primarily in the eastern provinces engaging in violent clashes for territorial control (Stearns and Vogel), thus exacerbating the suffering of civilians and contributing to a humanitarian landscape characterized by instability and insecurity (Autesserre 2010). As of 2024, approximately 7.1 million people are internally displaced within the DRC, with a significant concentration in the eastern regions (UNHCR). This displacement crisis is compounded by food insecurity, with one in four Congolese facing hunger and malnutrition (WFP). Humanitarian needs are staggering, as 13.1 million individuals continue to require assistance (OCHA). The situation is further aggravated by the ongoing threat of diseases, including Ebola (WHO). Humanitarian response has been hindered by several factors, including bureaucratic constraints, security challenges, and a lack of funding (Autesserre

2014). The DRC's 2023 humanitarian response plan received a limiting 40% of necessary funding, severely limiting the capacity of aid organizations to provide essential services such as healthcare and sanitation (OCHA). The overwhelming demand for aid in overcrowded camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) has led to increased vulnerability, particularly for women and children, who face heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence (Eriksson Baaz and Stern). Due to poor governance, the DRC has struggled to establish stability and effectively address such a damaging crisis. (Carter Center). International humanitarian organizations continue to play a crucial role in addressing the crisis, providing emergency assistance and advocating for the rights of the affected populations (Autesserre 2014). However, the persistent instability and violence pose significant challenges to their operations, as access to vulnerable communities remains severely restricted (OCHA). The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which has been present for over two decades, has undergone a phased withdrawal amid criticisms regarding its effectiveness in improving security conditions (UN News). In the face of such harsh conditions, the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a complex issue requiring urgent attention from the international community. Addressing the immediate needs of displaced and food-insecure populations is essential, as well as the crafting of long-term solutions (Autesserre 2012).

Definition of Key Terms

Humanitarian Crisis

A situation in which there is a significant threat to the health, safety, or well-being of a large group of people, often requiring urgent assistance.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Individuals who are forced to flee their homes but remain within their country's borders, often due to conflict or violence.

Armed Groups

Non-state actors that engage in organized armed conflict, often contributing to instability and violence in the region.

Food Insecurity

A condition in which people lack reliable access to sufficient quantities of affordable, nutritious food, leading to hunger and malnutrition.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

Violence directed at individuals based on their gender, including sexual violence, which is prevalent in conflict zones.

Displacement

The act of forcing someone to leave their home or country, often due to conflict, violence, or natural disasters.

Peacebuilding

Efforts aimed at establishing lasting peace and preventing the recurrence of conflict, often involving political, social, and economic initiatives.

Humanitarian Response Plan

A coordinated strategy developed by humanitarian organizations to address the needs of affected populations in crisis situations.

Conflict Minerals

Natural resources extracted in conflict zones, often used to finance armed groups and perpetuate violence, particularly in the DRC.

Regional Stability

The condition of political and social stability in a region, which is often threatened by cross-border conflicts and the activities of armed groups.

Governance

The process of decision-making and the implementation of policies and laws, crucial for establishing stability and addressing humanitarian needs.

International Aid

Assistance provided by governments, NGOs, and international organizations to support humanitarian efforts and development in crisis-affected regions.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Rwanda

Rwanda has been implicated in supporting armed groups in eastern DRC, which complicates the security situation. The Rwandan government has also been involved in regional discussions aimed at stabilizing the area and addressing the humanitarian crisis.

Uganda: Uganda plays a critical role as a host country for refugees fleeing the DRC. It has also been involved in regional diplomatic efforts to address the ongoing conflict and provide humanitarian assistance to those affected.

United States

The U.S. is a significant donor of humanitarian aid to the DRC, supporting various programs aimed at alleviating suffering and promoting stability. It also engages in diplomatic efforts to encourage peace and security in the region.

United Kingdom

The UK provides humanitarian assistance and has been active in advocating for international attention and support for the DRC crisis. It has also contributed to UN peacekeeping efforts in the region.

France

France has historically been involved in the DRC and continues to provide humanitarian aid. It has also participated in peacekeeping missions and diplomatic efforts to stabilize the country.

United Nations (UN)

The UN plays a pivotal role in addressing the humanitarian crisis through its peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) and various agencies, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which coordinates international humanitarian response efforts.

European Union (EU)

The EU is a major donor of humanitarian aid to the DRC and supports initiatives aimed at promoting peace and stability. It also monitors human rights conditions in the country.

African Union (AU)

The AU engages in diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts in the DRC and promote regional stability. It supports peace initiatives and encourages collaboration among member states.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The ICRC provides humanitarian assistance and protection to victims of armed conflict and violence in the DRC. It focuses on delivering emergency aid, health services, and support for displaced populations.

World Food Programme (WFP):

The WFP addresses food insecurity in the DRC by providing food assistance to millions of people affected by the crisis. It works to combat malnutrition and improve access to food for vulnerable populations.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The UNHCR leads efforts to protect refugees and internally displaced persons in the DRC. It advocates for their rights and coordinates assistance programs to ensure their safety and well-being.

Timeline of Events

Date

Description of Event

November 15, 1884, to February 26, 1885	Via the Berlin Conference, the Congo officially became Belgian territory under King Leopold II; therefore, marking the commencement of a 23 year long period of horrendous living conditions and exploitation for the inhabitants of the Congo.
November 15, 1908	Caused by international outcry over the sub-par living conditions for the Congo-ans, the 'Congo Free State' (the state that was governed viciously by King Leopold II) is transformed into the Belgian Congo, being governed by the, apparently, more just Belgian government rather than the monarchy.
June 30, 1960	Congo gains independence and becomes the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
November 24, 1965 to May 1997	Characterized by an anarchy-like political climate, unrest ensues and the DRC is plunged into turmoil. A politician named Mobuto Sese Seko sees the opportunity and takes power via a coup. Up until 1997 when it was finally ended, Mobuto's regime brought a plethora of human rights issues to the nation; lack of access to education/healthcare/jobs due to money laundering and therefore resulting in steep economic failure.
November 2, 1996 to May 17, 1997	The first Congo war commences when foreign interference from Uganda and Rwanda means that rebels want to overthrow the Mobuto government. They eventually succeed and a new presidency is established under Laurent-Désiré Kabila.
August 2, 1998 to	The second Congo war occurs, also dubbed the 'Africa World War' because a plethora of African nations, militaries and rebel groups were involved; all fighting over control of the Congo. It

2003	officially ended in 2003, but the aggression discretely ensues in select areas.
2006	First ever democratic election process occurs and the Congo names the son of former president Laurent-Désiré Kabila, Joseph Kabila, the president.
2008	Fighting and aggression occurs once more when the Congolese army is being opposed by rebel groups led by Laurent Nkunda (a leading member of the political opposition to Kabila.)
2012-2013	A rebellion ensues, led by former members of the rebel group led by Nkunda (the CNDP), but is beaten by the UN-backed Congolese army.
2016	As Joseph Kabila's second term comes to an end, the political suspense and tension in the region is once again at a high. The democratic elections are postponed and delayed resulting in anger and violence.
2018	A new president, Felix Tshisekidi, is announced and he peacefully assumes the presidency.
2019-21	Security situation in the eastern provinces is as yet unsafe and large scale amounts of human rights abuses occur.
2021-today	An Islamic Militant Terrorist Organization, namely the 'Allied Democratic Forces', creates violence and aggression, drenching

the region in further political turmoil. The UN launches a peace-keeping mission, called MONUSCO, however, it is still in the process of stabilizing the region and a new solution along with further action is needed.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989):

This treaty focuses on the rights of children, including their protection from violence, exploitation, and abuse. Given the significant impact of the DRC's humanitarian crisis on children, this convention underlines the importance of safeguarding their rights and well-being.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979):

CEDAW addresses gender-based discrimination and violence, which are prevalent in the DRC due to ongoing conflict. The treaty emphasizes the need for measures to protect women and girls, particularly in humanitarian contexts.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966):

This treaty commits states to respect and ensure the civil and political rights of individuals. It is relevant to the DRC as it highlights the importance of protecting the rights of citizens amidst ongoing violence and instability.

United Nations Security Council Resolutions on the DRC:

The UN Security Council has passed numerous resolutions addressing the situation in the DRC, including the establishment of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). These resolutions aim to enhance peacekeeping efforts and protect civilians.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Scale-Up for Eastern DRC (June 2023):

In response to the escalating humanitarian crisis, the IASC activated a system-wide scale-up to coordinate humanitarian efforts in Eastern DRC. This event highlighted the urgent need for increased assistance and protection for affected populations.

World Humanitarian Summit (2016):

This global event focused on improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response efforts. It emphasized the need for increased funding and support for crises like that in the DRC, where millions are in need of assistance.

UNHCR's Regional Refugee Response Plan (2024):

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) launched this plan to provide coordinated support for refugees and displaced persons from the DRC. It aims to enhance protection, assistance, and durable solutions for affected populations.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Lusaka Ceasefire agreement of 1999

The Lusaka Ceasefire agreement was a ceasefire agreement to the Second Congolese War (Also dubbed 'The African World War') between the Democratic Republic of Congo and neighboring states. The countries which signed the armistice were the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Namibia, Uganda and Angola, and in doing so they agreed to disarm armed groups and stop all support to rebel groups, as well as recall all troops. Upon this Ceasefire, the MONUC peacekeeping mission (which shall be covered in greater depth later on in this chair-report) was launched and is still being maintained.

Nairobi Agreement of 2013

After the Democratic Republic of Congo beat down the M23 rebel/terrorist organization, the Nairobi agreement was signed between the two parties in which the DRC dictated the terms. The M23 had to accept the following; disbanding all troops and ideologies, and disarming all their forces. The M23 was a major opposer of the then democratically elected government of the DRC and the signing of the Nairobi Agreement was a milestone, however, in the long run the rebels remained a menace to the region's peace and stability.

MONUC

Standing for the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, this was established shortly after the signing of the 1999 Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement to maintain and ensure that treaties keep the terms of the treaty. It was re-launched in 2010 and the mandate was then renewed to help the DRC's government in maintaining the peace within the country.

STAREC

Different from the previous three solutions in that this is more humanitarian rather than political in nature, the STAREC (standing for Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan for War-Affected Areas), was an initiative originally launched by the DRC government, along with international aid, in order to re-stabilize and support conflicted and low income areas via infrastructure and economic aid.

Possible Solutions

Government and Economy Related; Anti-Corruption Laws

The implementation of Anti-Corruption Laws on the government can not only ensure that the government does not mishandle tax money and reduce money laundering, but will subsequently result in the improvement of the country's socio-economic status as more money will be allocated to healthcare and social services rather than stolen by the corrupt government. Over time this can result in an overall improvement in the quality of life and education, which will then subsequently result in less joining of terrorist/rebel groups (as these groups capitalize heavily on uneducated, cheap labor), and will improve the quality of life.

DDR: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

Disarmament entails all laws which disarm armed groups and prevent the acquiring of illegal weapons and the trade of arms on the black market. This can be via police forces, bans, etc. however, there should be a third party over-seeing the process in order to ensure that no corruption occurs and that all involved parties have their arms equally and fairly removed. This will mean that terrorists and combatants no longer have their weapons. Demobilization entails actually removing the rebel groups' operations and stopping it from going further. Finally, reintegration is re-incorporating these, now jobless, ex-combatants into society so that they can be of use.

Infrastructure Development

Lack of education, healthcare, and being engendered into poverty all results in unemployment and a mass of cheap labor available to powerful political parties to exploit and use as illegal combatants. By developing infrastructure and social welfare services not only will the DRC be able to weaken the forces of these security-endangering groups, but the overall quality of life for the citizens of the DRC will improve; finally putting an end to the decade-long conflict characterized by poverty, exploitation and anarchy.

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