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DR CONGO:

SUPPORT COMMUNITY-BASED TOOLS FOR MONUSCO

In recent years the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) has faced tremendous pressure to improve civilian protection in the volatile and violent eastern provinces of the country. The mission has seen its share of high-profile protection failures – including the mass rape of over 200 women, men and children in August of 2010. But MONUSCO is at the forefront of innovative tactics to protect civilians. In order to sustain and maximize these new efforts, however, the mission requires additional civilian and logistical capacity. MONUSCO also requires new information management and analysis systems in order to facilitate moving from a reactive to genuinely preventive protection posture.

CIVILIAN PROTECTION NEEDS

Violence, intimidation and latent insecurity continue to be a constant feature of life in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Rape, looting, and the destruction of property – sometimes whole villages – are prevalent throughout the east. Currently there are upwards of 1.2 million displaced people residing in North and South Kivu alone and new displacement continues. With the upcoming MONUSCO mandate renewal, there is discussion of changing the mandate, particularly with regards to the upcoming Congolese election. UN Security Council members must recognize that any new responsibilities will reduce resources for critical civilian protection tasks and must be kept to a minimum.

Insecurity has been exacerbated by the decision of the Government of DRC to reorganize the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) in North and South Kivu. The reorganization will break up existing army units (and problematic command structures) and improve the integration of former negative forces - including the former rebel group CNDP - into the FARDC structure. In the short-term the movement of FARDC units into central reorganization points has left security vacuums that are quickly being filled by other armed actors and destabilizing previously stable areas such as Rutshuru and Beni.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ The U.S and other members of the UN Security Council must maintain Protection of Civilians as a top priority, and prevent the diversion of scarce protection resources by keeping election-related MONUSCO tasks to the bare minimum.
- ❑ MONUSCO leadership should request that a full-time Protection of Civilians information analyst be hired to capture the analysis generated in the provincial capitals of Goma, Bukavu and Bunia and identify mission-level protection needs and trends.
- ❑ The MONUSCO Provincial-level Senior Management Groups on Protection should work together to develop a system that captures information collected by the Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) and Joint Protection Teams, and allows for analysis and action in a way that ensures the safety of mission staff and of the civilians providing them with information.
- ❑ The UN Fifth Committee should approve additional CLA posts, as well as additional provincial-level posts to support the training and management of their staff and to provide critical logistical and administrative support to the CLA program.

The movement of FARDC forces has also resulted in increased instances of forced labor, as soldiers coerce civilians into transporting their equipment and supplies long distances to the reorganization points.

MONUSCO PROTECTION ADVANCES:

It is amidst these ongoing challenges that the staff of MONUSCO continue to seek new ways to protect civilians from violence. The protection of civilians was made a priority for MONUSCO peacekeepers in 2008. Since then creative protection concepts – including Surveillance Centers and Joint Protection Teams (JPTs) – have inspired new initiatives known as Community Alert Networks (CANs) and Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs). These activities better connect peacekeepers with communities at risk. In North Kivu MONUSCO military units have adapted to new needs – and seriously stretched their capacity – with Standing Combat Deployments (SCDs); small, mobile and very short-term deployments of UN military designed to stabilize vulnerable communities.

Joint Protection Teams (JPTs):

The Joint Protection Teams incorporate UN military and police personnel and MONUSCO Civil Affairs, Human Rights, and Child Protection staff. These teams were developed to engage MONUSCO civilian staff in the work and protection efforts of the mission's forward military bases. JPTs were also meant to support the development of localized protection plans, and to enhance the mission's protection monitoring capacity.

The JPTs showed positive results in a number of communities, but lack of resources has seriously curtailed their potential. First, staff deployed on these short-term field missions have been diverted from their important full-time roles. Second, JPTs lack sufficient access to vehicles and other logistical support. This limits their ability to access the more remote MONUSCO bases and the most vulnerable communities. Finally, MONUSCO does not have the staff capacity to effectively capture or track JPT reporting or to follow up on their recommendations. This seriously weakens MONUSCO's ability to take proactive steps to reduce vulnerability and has left the JPTs playing a reactive rather than preventive role.

Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs):

The concept of the Community Liaison Assistants, or CLAs (formerly called Community Liaison Interpreters), was developed to extend and enhance the work begun by the Joint Protection Teams. CLAs are UN staff recruited locally to create a link between their communities and the peacekeeping

mission. They are deployed to MONUSCO bases to support the commanders and act as the eyes and ears of the mission.

The CLAs are members of the community and civilians find them more approachable than MONUSCO soldiers and international staff. They possess an insider's understanding of the nuances of local politics, personality and culture. They also act as negotiators, conflict analysts and, at times, interpreters and have quickly become indispensable to the commanders they work with.

The CLAs have been praised both within and outside the mission as a highly effective way to engage with local communities. One interviewee described them as having "more information than the (UN) battalion, the FARDC and the PNC combined." They have already shown powerful conflict prevention and mitigation results.

The CLAs receive training in the work of MONUSCO's substantive sections – human rights, child protection, political affairs, etc. – as well as report-writing and conflict analysis. However, the quality of training seems to vary from province to province. In North Kivu, CLAs have also received monthly feedback and mentoring to hone their skills and learn to manage the tricky relationships they need to navigate within their communities, as well as between the CLAs and MONUSCO commanders.

These relationships can be risky because the CLAs report on abuses and crimes committed within and against the communities in which they work and live. This makes it relatively clear to perpetrators who has reported those incidents to the peacekeepers. When the perpetrators are local authorities or security forces, the CLAs are even more at risk, and some of them have suffered intimidation and threats. Individually, some CLAs have developed informal ways to insulate themselves from blame and reduce their own vulnerability; nevertheless, at least one CLA has been evacuated and re-deployed for her own safety. In North Kivu, female CLAs have been hired but have not yet been deployed to the field due to concerns about their security.

In addition to their core role as a link between the forward UN military bases and the local communities, the CLAs are also the link between the JPT staff in provincial capitals and remote field sites. They help plan and facilitate the JPT visits and provide day-to-day follow-up on their recommendations. These two protection tools are designed to be complementary, but due to the lack of staff and logistical capacity the JPTs are currently targeting areas where the CLAs are not. This is an effort to spread scarce resources as widely as possible, but it has diluted the combined protection potential of these civilian protection tools.

Community Alert Networks and Early Warning Techniques:

Community Alert Networks (CANs) have been developed as a way to improve emergency communication between local civilians and the forward operating bases of MONUSCO soldiers. MONUSCO provides cell phones on closed networks to community Focal Points to create a direct, 24 hours-a-day link to the CLAs or MONUSCO commanders and are entrusted to relay information in case of an outbreak of violence.

Identification of the Focal Points in North and South Kivu has been undertaken in slightly different ways. In South Kivu the Focal Points are elected by their communities and are largely drawn from local administrators. In North Kivu they are selected based on surveys and discussions with the community, and by MONUSCO staff who identify people that are likely to be informed of incidents. This mainly includes local leaders and some civil society leaders.

In South Kivu it is hoped that the prominence of the Focal Points within their communities will afford them a level of protection from the exposure and vulnerability associated with their work. In North Kivu the MONUSCO-selected Focal Points have been kept confidential for their own protection, making it all the more important that the peacekeepers get the selection process right.

In addition to the challenges of identifying and protecting Focal Points and the risks of vesting a small number of individuals with the power and responsibility for reporting on insecurity in their communities, more technical obstacles persist. The obvious limitation of this system is the lack or weakness of cell phone networks in many of the most vulnerable regions of North and South Kivu.

The sites for CAN implementation are chosen from amongst those communities that live within the coverage areas of DRC cell phone providers because MONUSCO troops can reach them by road within an hour. Unfortunately this eliminates many vulnerable communities from consideration.

A private company has offered to donate ten cell phone towers to expand the coverage areas. Even this, however, would provide only a maximum of 225 additional square kilometers, a drop in the bucket. Other initiatives, including programs to distribute high frequency radios or satellite phones, are in different stages of development.

Pressure from donors to see the CAN initiative deployed more rapidly has been intense, but the CAN concept is not just about the distribution of phones. It demands commu-

nity participation and requires extensive consultation and sensitization to ensure local leadership and effectiveness, and to evaluate pilot projects before the concept is rolled out more widely.

MONUSCO Military - Temporary Operating Bases, Standing Combat Deployments & Other Initiatives

MONUSCO's increased engagement with communities is a positive development, but it does run a risk of raising expectations that the mission cannot fulfill. If the community calls on the mission for help and no one responds, they will lose faith in the system and the mission as a whole.

To that end, the MONUSCO military – and in particular, the Indian and South African contingents in North Kivu – have taken a number of steps to broaden their presence, and have demonstrated a willingness to be flexible and creative in the face of ongoing resource deficits.

One example has been the creation of Standing Combat Deployments (SCDs) in the area around Livungi in Walikali territory. Some 30-35 troops are temporarily deployed to vulnerable towns in areas without MONUSCO bases in order to stabilize the situation, restore civilian confidence in the mission, and restore a sense of security in the wake of the incidents of mass rape in Livungi. These deployments provided a platform for MONUSCO soldiers to meet members of the community informally on market days and give them a chance to raise concerns and discuss safety.

Unfortunately there is a downside to this type of deployment. The SCDs are designed to last 72 hours, but in the fall of 2010, MONUSCO soldiers mounted some that lasted 20 to 25 days, exacting a toll on the peacekeepers that were living without proper accommodations or facilities. This exercise seriously strained the staff and resource limits of MONUSCO contingents. This wide deployment of soldiers - which required that MONUSCO military be pulled from other forward bases - also created force protection gaps that left certain deployments vulnerable in case of attack.

RESOURCE SUPPORT

Material and Logistical Resources:

Long-standing capacity gaps have plagued the mission for years. The recent withdrawal of some transport and combat helicopters has further weakened MONUSCO's ability to establish bases and respond to threats. Given the considerable gaps in military logistical capacity, it is imperative that civilian protection tools be used to the greatest possible extent. Additional civilian vehicles – specifically for the CLAs and JPT teams – would improve overall situational aware-

ness, and allow MONUSCO to better prioritize and deploy all mission protection resources.

In addition, there is a strong feeling – both among peacekeeping staff and within organizations that work with the peacekeepers – that MONUSCO administrative support teams at the provincial levels do not face much pressure to be creative and timely or to find ways to provide peacekeepers with the necessary resources to do their jobs. It is felt that it is too easy for these staff to say, “No, it can’t be done.” Resource constraints are real and UN regulations must always be respected, but provincial level administration teams need to be held to the same standard as the military and civilian substantive sections and pressed to fulfill their roles in a creative and energetic way.

Staff Capacity and Management:

In spite of the promising efforts being undertaken by the JPTs and CLAs, MONUSCO civilian units continue to be critically under-staffed. Though the MONUSCO Human Rights section has received an increase in staffing, Civil Affairs, Political Affairs and Child Protection units are all under-staffed. This shortage has seriously constrained the number of JPT visits.

UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General Roger Meece has talked repeatedly about the need for additional CLAs to expand their coverage area. However, in order for this to be feasible, there is a need for additional international staff to manage, train and mentor CLAs, as well as full-time logistical support staff at MONUSCO provincial headquarters. There is also a need for CLAs to be provided with independent transportation to allow them to work more widely within their deployment area, and to access civilians without the support (and presence) of MONUSCO military.

These new protection tools – as well as any additional staff capacity allocated to implement them – need to be applied in the service of a clear operational plan. This unifying vision is currently lacking. While a general mission-wide protection strategy exists, there is need for more specific operational objectives, a clearer division of labor, and better overall management from the mission’s senior leadership.

Currently, most of the non-military tools to protect civilians have been managed by MONUSCO Civil Affairs, but the unit lacks the staff to manage the day-to-day administration of these efforts and the overarching authority to compel participation of other MONUSCO units.

Some progress is being made to this end. The Senior Management Group on Protection (SMGP) has been created in

Kinshasa. This group is intended to generate better operational level guidance as to how protection tools and tactics (such as CLAs and patrols) can be used to achieve strategic protection goals. Similar working groups are being instituted at the provincial level as well and provincial Heads of Office should be empowered and supported by Senior Mission Leadership to develop their own operational protection plans.

To make this possible, three senior managers based in Bunia, Bukavu and Goma and responsible to the respective Heads of Office should be recruited to manage the cross-unit protection capacity and efforts. This civilian manager could provide support to the Head of Office to manage the work of the new provincial level Senior Management Group(s) on Protection.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The JPT and CLA initiatives are producing volumes of new field level information and analysis. Unfortunately, MONUSCO lacks the capacity to consolidate this information and discern the major protection threats and trends across provinces. Effective prevention requires the mission to leverage field level information to better understand both what is happening, and why, and to take steps to intervene effectively.

MONUSCO also lacks the capacity to analyze the relative effectiveness of protection activities or systematically capture lessons learned about protection initiatives. MONUSCO institutional memory of protection advancements must be captured and communicated so that the strides made towards protecting civilians are not lost when key staff leave the mission.

In Goma, Bukavu and Bunia, full-time staff have been recruited (though not yet deployed) to provide analytical support, but there is a need for additional capacity in Kinshasa to ensure mission-level analysis and prompt action on overarching trends of violence and insecurity. Furthermore, this analysis needs to feed into an information management system designed to protect civilian focal points and other informants, as well as the CLAs, and generate operational plans beyond just emergency response.

Refugees International Senior Advocate for Peacekeeping, Erin Weir, and Charles Hunt, Protection Program Leader at the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, researched MONUSCO’s civilian protection activities in March and April of 2011.