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DR CONGO: KATANGA IN CRISIS

Katanga, the richest province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is experiencing a humanitarian and security crisis that is worsening by the day. Since 2011, the number of internally displaced persons in the province has jumped from 55,000 to 500,000 – a more than 900 percent increase. The situation is further complicated by domestic politics, with President Joseph Kabila and many of his closest advisors originating from this province. Rumors of government complicity in the Katanga crisis permeate ongoing debates of how best to respond. While the United Nations and donor countries have been heavily involved in other parts of the DRC (particularly North and South Kivu provinces), international efforts to protect civilians in Katanga are falling short and must be enhanced well in advance of the 2016 national elections. The UN’s Strategic Response Plan for the DRC is funded at only 24 percent, which has made it difficult to scale-up aid in Katanga. This lack of funding, coupled with a lack of attention, has contributed to a failing humanitarian response.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

☐ Humanitarian Response:

- The UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the Democratic Republic of Congo must prioritize increased support for the Katanga humanitarian response in his messaging to donors and work with the humanitarian community to strengthen operations in the province.
- With roughly 20 percent of all internally displaced Congolese currently in Katanga, donors must ensure that their funding better reflects the geographical distribution of humanitarian needs.
- In response to fluid population movements, the U.S. and other donors should provide flexible, long-term funding that takes into consideration the extremely high operating costs in Katanga. Donor governments should also support education, protection, livelihoods, and early recovery in more stable areas of Katanga.
- Given the vast distances in the conflict-affected areas, donors should prioritize the provision of mobile clinics with the capacity to assist gender-based violence survivors.

☐ Protection of Civilians:

- The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) should deploy additional logistical and civilian resources in northern Katanga to increase patrols, conflict analysis, and reconciliation efforts.
- MONUSCO, with the clear support of the Security Council, should maintain – and if possible, upgrade – all current temporary operating bases in northern Katanga and open an additional base in Mitwaba.
- Joint operations in Katanga between MONUSCO and the Congolese armed forces must be avoided and no “Islands of Stability” should be created.
- The Security Council, the Special Representative of the Secretary General in the DRC, and the Great Lakes special envoys must advocate for national and provincial dialogues about Katanga’s future well before the DRC’s 2016 elections.

BACKGROUND

Katanga is the richest province in the DRC, and in many ways the most politically sensitive. Yet Katanga now faces two serious conflicts which have together destabilized an area larger than South Korea. These conflicts not only threaten the lives and livelihoods of local residents, but also the political and economic future of the DRC as a whole.

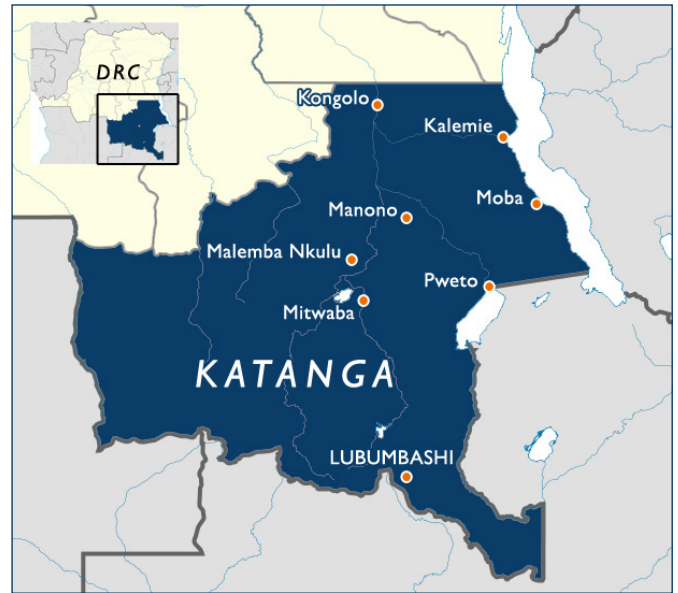
The first and most severe conflict is being fought by the Mai Mai Bakata Katanga (“The Ones Who Cut Katanga”) rebel movement. For the last three years, the group has mostly operated in the area between the towns of Pweto, Manono, and Mitwaba – the so-called “Triangle of Death.” More recently, however, the Triangle has expanded into a “Pentagon of Death,” with Bakata Katanga activities also recorded in parts of Moba and Malemba Nkulu territories. In just the first half of 2014, these rebels razed more than 100 villages – destroying thousands of homes, clinics, and schools.

The self-professed goal of the Bakata Katanga is independence for Katanga. The Katangan secessionist movement has a long history, beginning in the early 1960s with the short-lived State of Katanga. However, during a recent visit to the province, an RI team met with multiple sources who all shared the view of the UN Group of Experts on the DRC, which wrote in December 2013 that the Bakata Katanga “[serve] to further multiple political and economic agendas.”¹

The Bakata Katanga are, in many ways, the descendants of an earlier Mai Mai group led by the infamous warlord Gédéon Kyungu Mutanga. Gédéon’s Mai Mai were recruited by the Congolese government in the late 1990s to defend parts of Katanga from invading Rwandan forces. The Mai Mai soon went rogue, however – attacking civilians, ransacking villages, and recruiting child soldiers throughout northern Katanga. After Joseph Kabila became president of the DRC in 2001, he quickly moved to make peace with Rwanda and reintegrate many of the armed groups created under his father, Laurent. However, his attempts to buy off the Katangan Mai Mai failed. They continued to wreak havoc on the region until May 2006, when Gédéon surrendered. Just five years later, armed men freed Gédéon from his Lubumbashi prison, and he launched the Bakata Katanga shortly thereafter.

The consensus view among both local and international actors in Katanga and Kinshasa is that the Bakata Katanga receive significant support from certain Congolese officials at the local, provincial, and national levels. Some of these officials are thought to hold genuine secessionist views and see the Bakata Katanga as the military wing of their

¹ United Nations. “Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo.” December 12, 2013.



movement. Others treat the Bakata Katanga as an insurance policy – to be cashed in come 2016 if another Katanga native is not elected to the presidency. All of the group’s patrons likely benefit from rebel-controlled mining sites.

Recent attempts to neutralize and disarm the Bakata Katanga have failed in spectacular fashion. In late 2013, for example, a group of roughly 400 fighters arrived in Manono and offered to surrender. They were placed in a government-run demobilization camp nearby, where aid workers claimed that no food was distributed and that appalling sanitary conditions led to a cholera outbreak. Before arrangements could be made to relocate them, as many as 300 had disappeared into the bush. Units from the Congolese army (FARDC) have been deployed to counter the Bakata Katanga, but aid workers and officials say that most are unpaid, leading them to prey on the civilian population. They stand accused of pillaging, forced labor, forced marriage, and illegal taxation.

The second major conflict in northern Katanga is occurring between the Luba community and local Pygmy tribes known as the Batwa. Since 2012, fighting in the northern territories of Manono, Nyunzu, and Kalemie has displaced between 30,000 and 50,000 people. Many of the affected areas are remote and largely inaccessible to aid agencies and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in DRC (MONUSCO). Still, many serious rights violations and atrocities have been reported, including killings and the destruction of villages. Gender-based violence (GBV) in the Luba-Batwa conflict is believed to be especially severe, including allegations of the extraction of fetuses from pregnant women, kidnapping, and forced marriage.

It is not known what first sparked the hostilities, but many

analysts and aid workers interviewed by RI point to the fact that the Batwa have been marginalized for generations throughout Central Africa. They are viewed as “sub-human” by some traditional authorities and are not even permitted to touch food that is consumed by Bantu-speaking communities. Some Batwa in northern Katanga have been barred from mining on their own lands, and as their forests are destroyed, many have no choice but to become tenant farmers or servants for Luba landowners.

Aid workers familiar with the conflict told RI that the Batwa fighters are split amongst different communities, with no clear leadership structure. They also claim that many Luba chiefs in the area are deeply resistant to changing their relationship with the Batwa, and that they would rather fight than seek a settlement. This has made it difficult for potential mediators to facilitate dialogue.

An additional front in the Katanga conflict has recently opened along the province’s northern border. Multiple sources told RI that rebel groups who previously operated mostly in North and South Kivu provinces – including the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), the National Liberation Forces (FNL), Raia Mutomboki, and Mai Mai Yakutumba – have now crossed over into Katanga. RI also received unconfirmed reports that FDLR militants had embedded with local Batwa communities and were fighting alongside them.

Regrettably, the ongoing violence in northern Katanga is still poorly understood. Many questions about the identities of the armed actors, their motivations, and their patronage networks remain unanswered. What is clear, however, is that the situation will deteriorate over the next two years if left unchecked. Nearly every official interviewed by RI expressed serious concerns that as DRC’s 2016 election approaches, the political rifts in the province will become more pronounced and more violent. And that could produce a situation for which no-one – neither the Congolese government nor the international community – is remotely prepared.

HUMANITARIAN OVERVIEW

Displacement in northern Katanga is extremely fluid, and the precise number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is far from clear. But as of March 2014, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that there were 500,000 IDPs in Katanga. As the conflict continues to widen, the number of IDPs is growing.

Despite the mineral wealth in the province, many people in the north lack basic services and survive on what they are

able to grow or earn working in artisanal mines. Cholera, measles, and malaria are endemic. Even in times of peace, people in northern Katanga face chronic food insecurity, isolation, and a lack of access to education and healthcare. When fleeing violence, families are forced to leave behind what little they have – including livestock, clothing, and household items – making them even more vulnerable.

Most conflict areas in the region are extremely difficult to access. Local roads are little more than sand tracks and become mostly impassible during the rainy season. Yet the Bakata Katanga are able to carry out frequent attacks over a wide area, including attacks on IDPs who have received humanitarian distributions. There are unconfirmed reports that some members of the FARDC will also pose as Bakata Katanga and take assistance from civilians.

Areas affected by the Luba-Batwa conflict have seen increased numbers of IDPs over the last 18 months, many of whom are making their way to villages further south where civilians fleeing the Bakata Katanga have also sought refuge. This conflict is taking place in an especially remote region where access to assistance is limited.

Humanitarian needs in northern Katanga are immense. Food insecurity is increasing, and many IDPs – including those who have been newly displaced – have yet to receive the UN’s three-month food distribution that is standard in DRC. According to OCHA, an estimated 75,000 children in the conflict zone will face severe acute malnutrition this year. Last year, only 64% of children who needed treatment for malnutrition received it. Of the 770 recorded cases of sexual violence in Katanga province, 70 percent of the cases were IDPs.

RI travelled to several IDP sites in Manono territory, and the conditions in which IDPs were living were abysmal. In one location, IDPs had yet to receive any assistance. They had constructed shelters out of leaves and twigs. Children were not in school. Many IDPs had been forced to flee without their identification cards. Women lacked access to sanitary supplies, and said they felt vulnerable to attacks when they went out of the village to collect water and firewood. Some IDP families told RI that this was the second or third time they had been displaced.

Despite the scale of the crisis, few humanitarian actors are responding. There are very few protection-focused organizations operating in the conflict-affected areas, despite the clear need for a protection response, particularly in response to GBV. Between 2006 and 2011, when Mai Mai attacks in the region dropped off, Katanga was considered to be in a development context. The humanitarian

actors who had responded to the crisis either pulled out or transitioned their programs to development. So when violence increased in 2011, agencies were unprepared to respond and slow to deploy staff with humanitarian experience.

NGO representatives told RI that the UN presence in Katanga, with few exceptions, is extremely weak. There is a perception amongst NGOs that the UN humanitarian agencies have prioritized the Kivus, but in fact, the same can be said of the NGO response. For example, there are roughly twice as many IDPs in North Kivu as in Katanga, but ten times the number of humanitarian organizations.

Fortunately, there is a network of national NGOs that is quite strong and should continue to be supported. However, they face many of the same funding and capacity challenges as INGOs. Overall, there is a widespread recognition on the part of humanitarians that, much to their own frustration, they are failing to respond effectively in Katanga.

Several reasons were cited for the lack of a humanitarian surge in Katanga, including the high costs of operating due to logistical constraints and poor infrastructure. The most oft cited reason though was a lack of funding. Every humanitarian agency currently operating in Katanga that RI interviewed wanted to expand its programs but was unable to do so due to financial constraints. Indeed, the entire country – including the Kivus – is plagued by a lack of humanitarian funding. Current crises in South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Syria, as well as donor fatigue with DRC in particular, were all cited as reasons why humanitarian funding is so scarce. With only 24 percent of the UN's Strategic Response Plan funded, aid to IDPs and host families throughout the country is falling short. And without additional support from donors, it is clear that directing more money to the humanitarian crisis in Katanga will mean cuts to programs in other provinces.

The Special Representative of the Secretary General in DRC visited Katanga in February 2014, drawing attention to the growing humanitarian and security crisis. Humanitarian actors told RI that his visit led to subtle but important changes in the response. As one humanitarian explained, "Donors and politicians were focused on the Kivus and are slowing waking up to the crisis here." The UN Humanitarian Coordinator, on the other hand, was widely criticized for not visiting Katanga and for not making the neglected crisis more of a priority. The Humanitarian Coordinator should therefore use his advocacy role to raise the profile of the crisis in Katanga.

As evidence of the growing concern about the humanitarian crisis in Katanga, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) recently released 5 million euros for Katanga, the majority of which will go to food security programs and the World Food Program (WFP). This allocation of resources is an important development and will allow WFP (which faces immense funding shortfalls throughout the country) and cash-strapped NGOs to expand both their capacity and their programs. Furthermore, food insecurity is dramatically increasing throughout the region and the new funding will be extremely important in meeting the immediate food needs of IDPs. Unfortunately, the additional ECHO funding has gone to NGOs already present in the province rather than attracting new NGOs as was hoped.

In addition, the Pooled Fund, a multi-donor humanitarian fund under the authority of the Humanitarian Coordinator in the DRC, will make a special allocation of \$5 million for six-month programs in Katanga. Since the Pooled Fund itself is experiencing financing shortfalls this year, its allocation will prioritize lifesaving assistance. However, humanitarians RI spoke to raised concerns that protection, education, and GBV programs were seen as secondary priorities in Katanga. While the focus on lifesaving assistance is essential given the worsening humanitarian context, it is important to note that large funding gaps remain in protection-related activities, including GBV, emergency education, and livelihoods.

While prevalence rates are unclear, RI is deeply concerned about the lack of response to survivors of GBV. Women and girls in the areas impacted by fighting between the Bakata Katanga and the FARDC face a risk of sexual violence and other forms of GBV, and anecdotal evidence suggests that sexual violence is widespread in the Batwa-Luba conflict. Health facilities have been looted and destroyed in the conflict, so in most areas women lack access to healthcare. Funding limitations mean that not all functioning health facilities have received post-exposure prophylaxis kits and the requisite training. Given the vast distances in the conflict affected areas, mobile clinics equipped to respond to the medical needs of survivors should be a priority for donors.

Fluid and dynamic displacement patterns are further complicating the humanitarian response. IDPs are being displaced multiple times as the Bakata Katanga attack villages where IDPs have sought refuge. In some cases, IDPs return to their villages, only to be attacked again. NGOs explained that these dynamics made it difficult for them to respond. As one NGO explained to RI, "We arrive in a village with our distribution list and find that there are many more IDPs than we'd planned for. The needs continue to overwhelm us."

Given the cyclical and fluid nature of displacement patterns, and the lack of humanitarian agencies operating in the conflict areas, some donors say that they lack a clear analysis of what the needs are. But without sufficient numbers of experienced partners on the ground, it is difficult to have detailed information about the precise needs. As a result, humanitarian actors find themselves caught in a vicious circle, unable to scale-up their programs to meet the expanding needs of the population.

While much of the displacement in Katanga is fluid, there are areas where IDPs have been displaced on a more long-term basis. As in other parts of DRC, a majority of IDPs live with host families, but funding shortfalls are preventing humanitarian agencies from assisting hosts, many of whom have exhausted their meager resources assisting IDPs. Where possible, support that allows IDPs and host communities to be more self-sufficient should be a priority for humanitarian agencies. Examples include distributing seeds and tools, cash-for-work programs, and school feeding programs. As a result of the proliferation of humanitarian crises globally, humanitarian funding for DRC is likely to continue to decline in the coming years, and building the self-sufficiency of communities in the conflict-affected areas could make them less dependent on humanitarian assistance in the long term. Given widespread expectations that violence will continue through the presidential elections in 2016, these investments could prove vital.

PROTECTING CIVILIANS

Three years into the Katanga crisis, international efforts to protect civilians are wholly inadequate. At the time of RI's visit, just 450 of MONUSCO's 19,500 military personnel were deployed throughout the entire province. In the Bakata Katanga-affected areas, the mission relies on one helicopter and three temporary operating bases (TOBs) with less than 40 soldiers each. In early 2014, MONUSCO dispatched roughly 100 Egyptian peacekeepers to establish a presence in Pweto, but the soldiers soon contracted malaria and had to be withdrawn. At the time of writing, it was not clear when or where they would be redeployed.

RI visited one MONUSCO base in the conflict-affected region and met soldiers and civilian staff who were extremely frustrated that they lacked the resources to do more to protect civilians. The 35 peacekeepers there were responsible for patrolling more than 20,000 square kilometers of territory and faced enormous logistical challenges. Soldiers and civilian staff said that they received reports of new attacks every week, but poor road conditions, unreliable vehicles, and a lack of manpower limited their

capacity to respond. They were largely unable to deter attacks in outlying areas – including villages affected by the Luba-Batwa conflict – or respond to incidents in progress.

MONUSCO's civilian presence in the field is also extremely weak. A handful of Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) and Community Alert Networks operate out of TOBs in the north, and they provide valuable intelligence and help the mission interface with local populations. However, few international civilian staff from other functional areas are based in the field. This limited civilian capacity prevents MONUSCO from understanding conflict trends, documenting abuses by armed groups (including the FARDC), and supporting local reconciliation efforts.

MONUSCO does have one important asset in northern Katanga: a reputation for impartiality. Unlike in northeast DRC, UN peacekeepers in Katanga do not perform joint operations with the FARDC, and the mission's Force Intervention Brigade is not present there. MONUSCO's protection activities very much focus on patrols and "protection by presence." As a result, peacekeepers in the region told RI that they were not targeted by the Bakata Katanga or other local armed groups.

MONUSCO has a policy of not initiating contact with the Bakata Katanga without the cooperation of Congolese authorities, yet peacekeepers told RI that rebels they encountered during patrols were not hostile and would speak to them. On some occasions, MONUSCO was even able to escort local leaders into the bush for dialogue with the Bakata Katanga. According to press reports, one of the Bakata Katanga's top leaders, the aforementioned Gédéon, has even offered to disarm to MONUSCO. However, when the peacekeepers patrolled jointly with the FARDC, the rebels would refuse to engage.

There is no doubt that MONUSCO's operations in the province should be scaled-up; the question is for what purpose. In the Kivus, where the mission is most active, MONUSCO is attempting to neutralize armed groups and restore state authority – often through joint offensives with the FARDC. Employing such a strategy in Katanga would be ill-advised and impractical. Given the Security Council's continued focus on the Kivus and the shortage of peacekeeping resources worldwide, MONUSCO simply cannot mobilize a force large enough to neutralize the Bakata Katanga or other local armed groups. Joint operations with the FARDC should be ruled out due to the alleged complicity of government officials in the violence and the poor performance of Congolese forces locally.

In short, if MONUSCO tries to replicate its strategy from the Kivus in Katanga, it will fail to meet its protection goals, open itself to attacks from the Bakata Katanga and other armed groups, and be dragged into a conflict it does not understand or control. Instead, MONUSCO should accept its limitations in Katanga, make strategic investments, and then support efforts toward a political solution.

The first investment MONUSCO should make is in its soldiers on the ground. The mission should deploy additional troops to its bases within the conflict-affected areas – and, where possible, upgrade its temporary operating bases to larger, better, equipped company operating bases. Even increasing the mission’s footprint by a few hundred soldiers (with the appropriate logistical support) would allow for more frequent patrols and more effective civilian protection efforts. However, these soldiers should not engage in joint operations with the FARDC, and joint patrols should be limited. Since the region is so large, MONUSCO must also ensure it has enough bases to quickly access conflict areas. At a minimum, a new TOB should be established in Mitwaba, and plans to close the TOB in Kongolo should be abandoned.

MONUSCO’s second investment should be in civilian capacity. The number of CLAs in conflict-affected areas should be at least doubled, and MONUSCO’s provincial headquarters in Kalemie and Lubumbashi should be given enough resources to properly analyze and interpret the data gathered by CLAs. Adding political affairs officers and civil affairs officers (including protection of civilians specialists) to field bases would significantly increase the mission’s understanding of conflict dynamics and facilitate reconciliation where possible. Finally, human rights and child protection officers should also be deployed in order to track violations, assist survivors, and ensure MONUSCO’s adherence to the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy.

RI was informed that MONUSCO plans to establish an “Island of Stability” in Manono territory. The “Islands” concept involves stabilizing an area (through either MONUSCO and FARDC operations, or negotiations with armed groups) and then implementing projects aimed at restoring state authority over a six-month period. Laudable though those goals may be, “Islands” in other parts of the DRC have been poorly implemented, alienating both NGOs and UN agencies, and have a questionable track record of leading to stability. Unlike in the Kivus, MONUSCO currently enjoys a healthy relationship with humanitarian actors in Manono, and that should not be squandered. For these reasons, MONUSCO should not create an “Island” in Manono. Based on negative experiences with “Islands” in

the Kivus, RI is also recommending that the concept be abandoned country-wide.

Having a greater presence in the region would allow MONUSCO to better protect civilians and resolve some conflicts. Yet bringing real stability to Katanga will require political engagement at a much higher level. Congolese leaders in Kinshasa and Katanga still have not resolved fundamental debates about provincial governance and development – such as whether to divide Katanga into smaller provinces, how to distribute its mineral wealth, and how to protect the rights of marginalized groups like the Batwa. These issues are enflaming the current conflict. Therefore, the Security Council, the Special Representative of the Secretary General, and the Great Lakes special envoys must push for national and provincial dialogues about Katanga’s future well before the 2016 national elections. If they fail to do so, the consequences for Katangans, and the DRC as a whole, could be catastrophic.

Michelle Brown and Michael Boyce assessed the humanitarian needs of internally displaced people in Katanga Province in May 2014.