



# Field Dispatch: The Need for a Single Peace Process in Africa's Great Lakes Region

Aaron Hall July 2013



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The project to end genocide and crimes against humanity

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**COVER PHOTO**

Congolese military soldier near the front lines of recent fighting between Congolese forces and M23 rebels north of Goma in eastern Congo ( Timo Mueller/ Enough Project, July 14, 2013 ).

*This report is based on recent field research conducted by Enough Project field staff in Uganda, at the site of the Kampala Peace Talks, and on the front lines of combat between the Congolese military and M23 rebels near the area of Mutaho, just north of Goma, North Kivu province.*

The renewed fighting between the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo, or DRC, and the M23 rebel movement in eastern Congo is creating urgency for the establishment of a viable mechanism to create peace between the warring parties, ensure security and stability for embattled communities, and create space for humanitarian relief and economic recovery in the region. The time period between the July 31, 2013, International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, or ICGLR, heads of state meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, and the U.N. General Assembly in September presents the opening to create that mechanism.

Based on events on the ground in eastern Congo, as well as recent interviews with representatives from the parties engaged in the Kampala talks between the Congolese government and M23, it appears that progress in the talks is only being made at a cosmetic level. The Congolese government and M23 are currently attempting to discuss eight major issues, including refugee right of return, civilian protection, amnesty and political and military reintegration for M23, national reconciliation within Congo, and regional economic integration issues. Representatives from both the ICGLR and the Government of the DRC told the Enough Project that the parties are close to agreement on six of the eight issues but remain at loggerheads on two major issues: amnesty and military and political reintegration for M23 leaders and fighters. Representatives from M23, however, told the Enough Project that the two sides still could not agree on the fundamental definitions of terms such as amnesty or military and political reintegration, let alone be near agreement on a host of other issues, suggesting that the Congolese government was not negotiating in earnest at present.

Both the Congolese government and M23 continue to employ delay tactics to stall the talks to further various internal political agendas and wait for opportunities to make military gains on the battlefield—as seen in the most recent round of fighting outside

Goma. Meanwhile, the ICGLR, being led by the current rotating chair of Uganda, is, according to many observers, more concerned with delivering an agreement to bolster its status as a regional power than with the substance of what that agreement might contain—a potentially dangerous dynamic for those stakeholders looking for a sustainable solution that brings peace and accountability to eastern Congo.

The U.N. special envoy for the Great Lakes region, former Irish President Mary Robinson, in conjunction with the newly appointed U.S. special envoy to the region and the DRC, former Sen. Russ Feingold (D-WI), must press to create a single, coordinated peace process under the umbrella of the nascent U.N. Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region, or U.N. PSCF. Otherwise, all stakeholders risk having disparate regional dialogue initiatives that don't fit into the PSCF framework, address the root causes of the conflict, or help achieve a cohesive peace in the Great Lakes.

In order to expand transparency, inclusivity, and address core drivers of conflict under the U.N. PSCF, the United Nations and its partners should work to either consolidate and conclude the Kampala talks and help ensure that the Congolese national dialogue fits into the U.N. PSCF; or create a new iteration of the Kampala talks that includes the United Nations, international partners, and particularly brings Rwanda to the table to discuss solutions to the instability in eastern Congo. This should be done by prioritizing the following actions:

1. Use the ICGLR Heads of State meeting in Nairobi and the run-up to the U.N. General Assembly in September 2013 to bring the ICGLR, Uganda, Congo, and Rwanda together to agree to conclude the Kampala talks and commit to continuing talks under the PSCF; or alternatively restart the Kampala talks with an expanded scope to include participation from all signatories to the U.N. PSCF, particularly the state of Rwanda, which to this point has been absent from any political process to create peace in eastern Congo.
2. Work with the Government of the DRC, opposition, and civil society to shift and share responsibility for coming to a consensus on an inclusive national consultations process under the commitments made by signing the U.N. PSCF to further structural reform of government institutions and to further the agenda of reconciliation, security sector and judicial reform, and democratization. The United Nations and its international partners must ensure that the Congolese national consultations process does not move forward under the monopolistic control of the ruling coalition for risk of derailment, marginalization of opposition voices, and a lack of political will to implement any potential outcomes.
3. Work with regional states and international stakeholders to prioritize regional economic integration as a means of incentivizing commitment to the U.N. PSCF and solidifying security, stability, and development in eastern Congo and the region.

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## Renewed conflict

A recent return to violence between the Government of the DRC and the M23 has temporarily worsened the prospects for a successful regional peace deal. Fighting between the Congolese army and the M23 rebel group has resumed just north of Goma in eastern Congo.

While the United Nations clarified that its mission was prepared to use “lethal force” to protect civilians, its peacekeeping mission only provides logistical support at this point to Congo’s army.<sup>1</sup> Despite initial rumors to the contrary, the United Nations is not actively partaking in the fighting.<sup>2</sup> However, the latest escalation takes place against a growing militarization of the peacekeeping mission. The new U.N. intervention brigade—supported by Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, or UAV,—could join the army in fighting M23, or it could target other major rebel groups in the region. The commander of the brigade has not yet indicated in which direction it will go.

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## Divergent paths to peace

With the backdrop of this recent violence, there are currently three disparate political processes occurring in the region, complicating efforts to establish a comprehensive peace. None of these mechanisms has yet to fully establish a proven road map for quelling the violence in Congo or bringing all necessary stakeholders to the table to discuss strategies for creating nonmilitary solutions to regional conflict.

- First, the Kampala talks between Congo and the M23 being mediated by the ICGLR, which have all but broken down. Desultory engagement and delay tactics have led to the recent clashes between the Congolese military and M23 in North Kivu. The talks have been marked by a lack of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity from affected communities and focused almost exclusively on military solutions.
- Second, the U.N. PSCF, being managed by the U.N. envoy and including 11 regional states plus the ICGLR, SADC, and the African Union. This framework agreement has the broadest scope of support within the region and is the most comprehensive of the three processes in terms of generating civil society inclusion and addressing key drivers of regional conflict. This process also enjoys the greatest level of international legitimacy given the leadership of Mary Robinson and the collaborative nature of the U.N. PSCF itself.
- Finally, the Congolese national consultations process theoretically intended to address key national issues. President Joseph Kabila announced his intention to launch this initiative in December 2012 but then backtracked in an announcement in June calling them “national consultations.”<sup>3</sup> There have been substantial disagreements over the pro-

cess between the government, opposition, and civil society, with the opposition and civil society viewing the talks as being manipulated by Kabila for political gain without being inclusive or discussing substantive issues. However, there is common ground between the three parties on several issues from having international observers at the talks to a recognition that the results of the 2011 elections should not be nullified.

Ostensibly, these processes are supposed to be working in conjunction with one another and under the PSCF framework to prevent the stove-piping of information and to generate cooperative agreement on a framework for addressing the long-term drivers of conflict in the region. But in fact, the three processes represent very different approaches to addressing conflict in the region, and each presents an opportunity for regional actors to manipulate the other ongoing processes.

For example, Congo can point to its initiation of a national dialogue as an act of good faith while simultaneously launching a military offensive in the east that endangers civilians and exacerbates core drivers of instability. Or Rwanda can point to its commitment to the U.N. PSCF process, but then withdraw support based on the Congolese and U.N. military operations in North Kivu that have spilled over onto its soil—operations derivative of the ICGLR talks where Rwanda has not been present.

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### New dynamics and new opportunities

With the Congolese government favoring/prioritizing military solutions, the M23 pushing for amnesty and special political status in eastern Congo, and Rwanda questioning the legitimacy and efficacy of the U.N. peacekeeping presence in the region, the pitfalls of allowing these processes to proceed on varying tracks are compounding each day.

As detailed below, however, a number of recent developments are creating a shift in both the regional and international political dynamics of all three processes and could ease the transition of merging them into a single process under the U.N. PSCF.

### The resurgence of fighting between Congo and M23 in North Kivu province

The most recent derailment of the Kampala talks between Congo and M23 was compounded with the recent clashes in North Kivu. Each side continues to accuse the other of being the aggressor, and the chances of returning to the negotiating table in good faith in the near future are low. This changes the calculations of achieving success in Kampala for both the ICGLR mediation team and the conflicting parties. Further, Rwanda's recent accusations of Congo colluding with the FDLR and the joint Congo/U.N. military operations shelling Rwandan soil could complicate Rwandan involvement in regional cooperation and the U.N. PSCF.

## The operationalization of the joint ICGLR/U.N. intervention brigade

The regional 3,000-troop intervention brigade is nearly at full capacity. Of the three troop-contributing countries—South Africa, Tanzania, and Malawi—both the South African and Tanzanian contingents are in place, and Malawi should be following by August of this year. The United Nations has primary command and control over this brigade, but Tanzania, Malawi, and South Africa have control over their troops, and the ICGLR made clear to the M23 delegation in Kampala that a failure to come to agreement there could warrant military engagement. Therefore, the brigade's operational presence on the ground, including the Tanzanian contingent's support of the Congolese forces in the most recent round of fighting, further impedes the M23's ability to exercise leverage in Kampala. The objectivity and good faith of the ICGLR mediation team wanes substantially as ICGLR-backed troops and the M23's own begin to face off on the battlefield.

## The U.S. appointment of a special envoy for the Great Lakes region and the Democratic Republic of the Congo

In the wake of President Barack Obama's recent trip to Africa and the appointment of former Sen. Feingold as U.S. special envoy to the region and to Congo, the United States has signaled a stronger commitment to engaging in the conflict in the Great Lakes. Special Envoy Feingold brings a wealth of experience and relationships in the region from his tenure as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Africa. Given the recent appointment of Ambassador Susan Rice as director of the national security staff and the nomination of Samantha Power as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, the Obama administration has the ability to work in conjunction with the U.N. special envoy to exercise diplomatic and economic leverage that will be necessary to ensure the success of a broader peace process under the U.N. PSCF.

## The start of the U.N. PSCF benchmarking process

Special Envoy Robinson has been cooperating with signatories to the U.N. PSCF to establish a set of benchmarks for signatory countries regarding a number of security, political, economic, and social development objectives. These benchmarks will be reviewed at the ICGLR Heads of State Summit in Nairobi, Kenya on July 31, in Nairobi, Kenya. The commitment to and implementation of these benchmarks will be critical to establishing credibility of the U.N. process, particularly ahead of the U.N. General Assembly in September 2013, where the first major assessment of the U.N. PSCF will take place.

## The World Bank's \$1 billion commitment to the Great Lakes region

The World Bank made this monetary pledge to propel regional economic integration in Congo and neighboring states.<sup>4</sup> It is aimed at bolstering the provision of basic social services in Congo such as health and education, supporting ongoing energy and hydroelectric initiatives in the region, and increasing cross-border trade in the Great Lakes. This commitment provides the international community with economic leverage to incentivize agreement and regional cooperation among Great Lakes states. If tied to commitments made under the U.N. PSCF framework and backed with additional economic investment from other international partners—particularly the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union—the money signals commitment from the international community to increase investment in the region, and provides initial assurance to hesitant private-sector investors that the potential for growth and development exists in eastern Congo and the region.

Based on these developments, the U.N. special envoy and her international partners face a critical decision—whether to commit to binding together these incongruous processes under a common set of principles and objectives, or to allow each process to run its course in hope that the U.N. Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region will remain legitimate and intact.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Phil Moore, "DR Congo says 130 dead in clashes between army, rebels," ReliefWeb, July 16, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/dr-congo-says-130-dead-clashes-between-army-rebels>.
- 2 Chrispin Mvano, "Congo army helicopters pound M23 rebels near Goma," Reuters, July 16, 2013, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/16/us-congo-democratic-fighting-idUSBRE96F14Z20130716>.
- 3 Stephanie Wolters, "Kabila loses concertation in Congo," Mail & Guardian, July 19, 2013, available at <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-07-19-00-kabila-loses-concertation-in-congo>.
- 4 The World Bank, "World Bank Announces US\$1 Billion Pledge to Africa's Great Lakes Region, Targeting Energy, Roads, Agriculture, Cross-Border Trade, Health, and Jobs," Press release, May 22, 2013, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/05/22/world-bank-announces-us-1-billion-pledge-to-africa-great-lakes-region-targeting-energy-roads-agriculture-cross-border-trade-health-jobs>.

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Enough is a project of the Center for American Progress to end genocide and crimes against humanity. Founded in 2007, Enough focuses on the crises in Sudan, South Sudan, eastern Congo, and areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army. Enough conducts intensive field research, develops practical policies to address these crises, and shares sensible tools to empower citizens and groups working for change. To learn more about Enough and what you can do to help, go to [www.enoughproject.org](http://www.enoughproject.org).

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