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FACT SHEET: Who is Bosco Ntaganda: Lynchpin to Security or International War Criminal?

Enough team April 2012

Who is Bosco Ntaganda? The tense security situation in North and South Kivu provinces in Congo has turned the world's attention to the infamous Congolese General, also known in the region as "The Terminator." Incongruously, he's been called both a war criminal and a lynchpin to regional stability; yet as a member and leader of several armed groups, he has left a bloody trail across the eastern Congo.¹

Most shockingly, juxtaposed against scenes of violence, mass rape, and civilian displacement is the comfortable, privileged life Ntaganda once led in the capital of North Kivu. For years he thrived in Goma, dining in the finest restaurants, occupying a luxurious villa just yards away from the Rwandan border, and moved with impunity as he raked in a fortune from exploitation of the region's illicit minerals trade—all within sight of the world's largest peacekeeping mission.²

Until recently he was a member of the Congolese Army, however, under still murky circumstances Ntaganda along with some of his most loyal troops have defected from the Army and retreated to his traditional stronghold north of Goma in the North Kivu province of eastern Congo. These actions have precipitated uncertainty and crisis throughout the region.³

Who is Bosco Ntaganda?

Bosco Ntaganda, believed to be in his late 30s, is a Rwandophone Congolese from the ethnic Tutsi community of eastern Congo. He got his start fighting with the Rwandan Patriotic Army, or RPA, in the early 1990s and took part in the RPA's overthrow of the Rwandan government's genocidal regime in 1994.⁴

Ntaganda and the *Forces Patriotiques pour la libération du Congo*, or FPLC

By the early 2000s, Ntaganda had worked his way up to chief of military operations for the *Forces Patriotiques pour la libération du Congo*, or FPLC, the military wing of the *Union des Patriotes Congolais*, or UPC, in the mineral-rich area of Ituri in northeastern Congo. As one of the top-ranking officers Ntaganda oversaw gross human rights abuses across Ituri, consisting of the forced recruitment of child soldiers, rape, house-to-house killings and torture of civilians. Many of these victims were hunted down on the basis of ethnicity.

Similarly, in November 2002, Ntaganda led FPLC attacks against Lendu civilians in the gold mining town of Mongbwalu. At least 800 people were killed. One survivor told Human Rights Watch researchers, “If you were Lendu, you would be exterminated.”⁵

While still a member of the FPLC, Ntaganda’s troops were also implicated in the killing of a Kenyan peacekeeper and the kidnapping of a Moroccan peacekeeper.

Ntaganda and the International Criminal Court

On 22 August 2006 the International Criminal Court, or ICC, issued an arrest warrant for Ntaganda for war crimes allegedly committed during his time as the Deputy Chief of General Staff for Military Operations for the FPLC, Ntaganda’s rebel group implicated in human rights violations in Ituri province of Congo. In the FPLC, Ntaganda served under recently convicted warlord Thomas Lubanga Dyilo.⁶ Like Lubanga, Ntaganda faces charges related to the recruitment, conscription, and deployment into hostilities of children under the age of 15.⁷

Beyond the FPLC war crimes for which Ntaganda faces indictment, the general has been connected to other gross human rights violations with the CNDP and the FARDC. For these crimes, both the outgoing Chief Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo and his successor, Fatou Bensouda, have Ntaganda in their sights.⁸

Most recently, Ocampo said the Office of the Prosecutor was planning to add to Ntaganda’s charges, noting, “After reviewing the evidence, we found that evidence is enough to present charges for murder and rapes against Bosco Ntaganda. We will do that.” The world’s top enforcer of international humanitarian law went on to say, “The Bosco Ntaganda case is showing the cost of impunity. After six years, he is still at large. In the meanwhile, he became the leader of one of the more dangerous militias in the Kivu [provinces], allegedly committing mass rapes. He cannot be a general in the DRC army. It is time to arrest him.”⁹

Ntaganda and the *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple*, or CNDP

In 2005 the Congolese authorities attempted to end the conflict in Ituri by offering Ntaganda the position of general in the newly reconstituted Congolese Army, the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*, or FARDC. Ntaganda refused and left Ituri for his home province of North Kivu, where he joined Laurent Nkunda's Rwandan-backed rebel group, the *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple*, or CNDP.¹⁰

With the CNDP, Bosco continued to oversee violent attacks on civilian populations. In November 2008, in one of the worst massacres of the late 2000s, the armed group slaughtered an estimated 150 people in the town of Kiwanja, North Kivu.¹¹ The attack which took place outside the wall of a UN peacekeeping compound, resulted in the displacement of thousands of civilians. A massive internally displaced persons camp remains on the site of the massacre today.

Ntaganda and the Congolese Army

After Nkunda's fall from power, Ntaganda took over leadership of the CNDP. In a peace deal between the group and the Congolese government, similar to the offer rejected in 2005, Ntaganda was made a general and his troops were integrated into the regular forces of the FARDC, despite the fact that Ntaganda still has an outstanding warrant from the International Criminal Court.¹² He was even charged with leading several offenses by the FARDC against the Rwandan Hutu rebel militia based in Congo, the FDLR.¹³

Since his integration into the regular army in 2009, Ntaganda has operated with impunity in eastern Congo; he's been connected to targeted assassination of military rivals, had a hand in "disappearances" of outspoken civil society critics, and has lined his pockets thanks to a stranglehold on the illegal gold trade.¹⁴

Moreover, Ntaganda's pension for targeting civilians did not end with his integration into the FARDC. In 2009 troops directly under his command killed at least 270 civilians near the towns of Nyabionda and Pinga, in the western Masisi territory of North Kivu.¹⁵

Even with his appalling history of human rights abuses in Congo, Ntaganda managed to avoid much of the international media's scrutiny; that is, until an NBA All-Star became tangled up in "The Terminator's" criminal activities. The name Bosco Ntaganda gained more notoriety on the public stage after the news of Congo-born basketball player Dikembe Mutombo's hapless involvement in a botched gold smuggling deal was highlighted by a U.N. Group of Experts report in late 2011. Not only did this sordid incident tarnish Mutombo's heretofore good name but it brought to light, in a sensational fashion, the pervasive level of corruption and exploitation of Congo's mineral resources by various armed groups.¹⁶

Until recently, Ntaganda lived in Goma as if it were his own personal fiefdom, an ICC-indictee living blocks away from the world's largest U.N. peacekeeping mission, with the title of "General" and a Congolese uniform to protect him from justice.

Endnotes

- 1 <http://congosiassa.blogspot.com/2012/03/adieu-bosco.html>
- 2 <http://motherjones.com/politics/2011/09/bosco-ntaganda-congo-warlord>, <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/drc-1209webwcover2.pdf>
- 3 <http://enoughproject.org/blogs/bosco-ntagandas-desperation>
- 4 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2008/04/29/dr-congo-suspected-war-criminal-wanted>
- 5 <http://hrw.org/news/2008/04/29/dr-congo-suspected-war-criminal-wanted>
- 6 <http://www.icc-cpi.int/menus/icc/press%20and%20media/press%20releases/pr776>, <http://enoughproject.org/blogs/congo-lubanga-conviction-raises-questions-about-bosco-ntaganda>
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- 8 <http://www.channel4.com/news/congo-bosco-ntaganda-terminator-war-crimes-suspect>, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/congoese-president-calls-for-arrest-of-warlord-bosco-ntaganda-wanted-by-icc/2012/04/11/gIQAKVUgAT_story.html
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- 16 <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-warlord-and-the-basketball-star-a-story-of-congos-corrupt-gold-trade/253813/2/>, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/africa/120129/congo-news-gold-smuggling-kase-lawal-nba-star-dikembe-mutombo-bosco-ntaganda>

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.

