



Africa Initiative Programme



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## **ITURI WATCH: INSECURITY PERSISTS AT THE END OF 2004**

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### **INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

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The security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (Kivus and Ituri) has severely deteriorated at the end of 2004. Politicians in Kinshasa have pledged their support to political process while continuing to support military solutions to the unresolved problems in the Kivus. As different politicians in Kinshasa attempt to hold on to power, and deter attention from the political transition process, they have not hesitated to instrumentalise ethnic and factional differences in Ituri.

Regionally, neighbouring countries have renewed their interest in Eastern DRC in both actions and words. <sup>1</sup> The fighting in the Kivus has shown that there is a real possibility of the derailment of the transition government in Kinshasa and a return to open conflict within the DRC and the Great Lakes region. The conflict in the Kivus has provoked a massive response by the DRC national government (reported 10,000 soldiers sent to North Kivu, primarily former FAC, FLC and Mai-Mai) as well as regional action (declaration by President Kagame that Rwanda would enter DRC on, November 23, 04, and reports of troop movements from Rwanda to East DRC, as well as increased Ugandan military presence on the border and in the Rwenzori Mountains. )The international community has also acted, via a series of bi-lateral and multi-lateral condemnations, including the possible suspension of bi-lateral aid, as well as an increase in deployment by the MONUC to the Kivus.

The national and international focus on the Kivus has detracted from problems in Ituri, and insecurity increased at the end of 2004, regardless of the presence of

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<sup>1</sup> See discourse P. Kagame in WEST AFRICA and various reports of local and international agencies on conflict and on direct Rwandan military involvement as well as support for armed movements in violation of UNSC resolution 1493

over 5000 UN peace-keeping mission soldiers in the district.<sup>2</sup> However, the continuation of conflict in Ituri poses little threat to the key stakeholders in the Government of National Transition (GNT.)<sup>3</sup>, and the generalised degradation of the security environment over the last three months has not been on national or International agendas. The local population of Ituri continue to suffer, and as one local administrator stated “We were hopeful when Kinshasa and the International Community paid attention as the fighting exploded [May 2003, the withdrawal of the Ugandan army and the ensuing bloodshed]. Now we have once again been forgotten”<sup>4</sup> The Disarmament and Community Reinsertion (DCR) programme, has made progress, but not in comparison to the high hopes of the population. The expected difficulties of convincing militia members to disarm (see AIP October Update) have resulted in an increase in insecurity for the civilian population and bolder acts of defiance to the peace process by militiamen. The combination of fighting in the Kivus and the problematic implementation of the DCR programme have contributed to a sense of fear and suspicion that has blocked some of the recent advances of reconciliation between the different communities in Ituri.

The institutional ingredients capable of promoting stability to Ituri are already in place and some of them are even getting reinforced in terms of human, financial and logistical resources. MONUC, the local government, the integrated Congolese national army (FARDC), the National Commission for Demobilisation and Reintegration (CONADER), and the judiciary have all made advances in Ituri.<sup>5</sup> However, the Ituri peace process is stalling, and according to interviews in Bunia, Tchomia, Kasenyi, and Mahagi,

**From the field:**

The hoisting of the Congolese national flag on 29<sup>th</sup> November at the town hall in Bunia, as well as airing national television programmes from Kinshasa for the first time in Bunia on 30<sup>th</sup> November, are powerful political symbols capable of assuring Iturians that they still belong to the Congolese nation.

there is a real fear that full-scale conflict will return to the troubled district. According to a local NGO worker, “The situation is the same as before,[May 2003] first degradation of the security, no real initiatives to addresses the root causes of the problem, and quickly it will get worse until it backslides into factional fighting.

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<sup>2</sup> See Reports Lotus Group, Dec 2004, Justice Plus, and interviews in the field.

<sup>3</sup> Although Ituri was the focus of international attention during the deployment of the International Emergency Multi-national Force (IEMF) in June–August 2003, the territorial control of the region has never been clearly defined by any of the major armed movements in the transitional government, and fighting in Ituri will have little effect on those who are part of the transitional government. Conflict in Ituri is largely attributed to the presence of “uncontrolled armed groups”, while the conflict in the Kivus is a manifestation of the conflict between former government forces (ex-FAC, Mai-mai) and the Rwandan backed rebel movements in the East. Aside from the civilian and humanitarian costs, conflict in Ituri will have little effect on the TNG. If full scale conflict breaks out in the Kivus, it is highly likely that the RCD (or at least key elements) will officially pull out from the transition process and the fragile DRC peace process will revert to war

<sup>4</sup> Telephone interviews Dec 2004

<sup>5</sup> See AIP November Ituri Update.

The presence of the MONUC will help to stabilise the major towns, but those in rural areas will suffer and massacres will continue. If the government and the international community continue to ignore the situation in Ituri, the logic of violence will prevail.”<sup>6</sup>

Bolder action to restore security has been taken recently in Ituri by both the Congolese national army (FARDC) and MONUC. At the same time, ethnically motivated violence, that seemed to belong to the past, has re-emerged in response to the rising insecurity. The conflict indicators reported by AIP here suggest that Ituri may be on the brink of backsliding into conflict. Accomplishments to consolidate peace are weakening. Decisive action is required to safeguard what has been achieved so far.

With the full commitment of all major actors, the conflict in Ituri can be stabilized. A year ago gestures of intercommunity reconciliation were being made to show that ethnically motivated violence between the major ethnic rivals, namely the Hemas/Gegere and the Lendus/Ngiti, was finished. For many Iturians, the end of 2004 has been marked by the fear of the possibility of return to full-scale conflict.<sup>7</sup>

**From the field:**  
The deteriorating security situation in Bunia and across Ituri has led to a virtual stop to the voluntary repatriation of IDPs from the camp at the Bunia airport. This camp has remained an eyesore in Bunia and moreover a powerful reminder of the conflict in Ituri. Currently, the IDP population in the camp stands at little over 10,000 individuals.

## CONFLICT INDICATORS

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### Proximate causes

#### ► *Radicalisation of the armed groups vis-à-vis the DCR programme*

Armed groups in Ituri, namely the UPC-L and the FAPC, continue to receive financial support (and implicit political backing) by personalities within the Transitional Government. Other armed groups continue to receive support from neighbouring governments and different non-state actors.<sup>8</sup> This partly explains the defiance some of the groups continue to disarm and commit to the DCR programme, despite

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<sup>6</sup> Interview Bunia. Local analyst. (December 2004)

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the situation is highly different from April 2003, as there are now over 5000 peacekeepers in Ituri with a proper mandate as well as the setting up of the government of transition in Kinshasa. At the same time, this renewed insecurity has created a perception amongst many Iturians that full-scale conflict will soon break out. It should be noted that perception is as important as reality in situations of conflict. (DAC/OECD working paper, 2000\_)

<sup>8</sup> Research in Kasenyi and Tchomia as well as telephone Interviews with authorities in Kinshasa and Kampala, as well as embassy officials and UN researchers. For detailed information on support to different armed factions see APPG report *Arms flows in eastern Congo*. 2004

having signed the "*Acte d'engagement*" in Kinshasa, earlier this year.<sup>9</sup>

► *Tactics used to stall the disarmament process*

In a bid to stall the disarmament process systematic threats have been made by militia commanders towards combatants under their command who have - on their own initiative - decided to demobilise. ("*Auto-demobilisation*"). Commanders have stated that they will only demobilise their troops if they are guaranteed positions within the national army. In the absence of this guarantee, the only leverage these leaders have is their soldiers and they are unwilling to relinquish this negotiating point with the national government, until they have been assured posts in the National Army. Assassinations of those attempting to voluntarily demobilise have been reported in Mahagi, incriminating the FAPC commanders, as well as in other parts of Ituri.

Commanders of all the main militia movements have disarmed their combatants, to prevent them from submitting to the DCR programme. This has left them with only arrows and spears at the mercy of their commanders. Fifty or so militiamen from the FNI/FRPI presented themselves in November at the Aveba transit site, and several stated that their arms had been requisitioned by their commanders. The current stalling of the disarmament process is a two-fold dilemma:<sup>10</sup>

- 1) Given the lack of formal military training of the majority of combatants, the only differentiation between civilian and militia is their possession of a weapon. If combatants were accepted to the program without weapons, almost the entire population would attempt to enter into the DCR program, making it impossible to differentiate combatants from civilians.
- 2) Militia commanders have collected the arms of their soldiers, and thus prevented them from entering into the DCR programme. By not being formally demobilised, these unarmed former combatants remain hostage to their armed groups and a force that can be readily mobilised as required.

► *Alienating security measures by MONUC in Bunia*

Following rumours of a planned attack on 17<sup>th</sup> November against MONUC and international organisations in Bunia, MONUC took measures to 'beef up' security around its Headquarters (HQ).<sup>11</sup> However, this included the barring of the District Commissioner's official car from driving through a passage manned by

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<sup>9</sup> In Kinshasa may 2004, the leaders of the main militia leaders in Ituri stated their support for the TNG in Kinshasa and to voluntarily disarm their soldiers.

<sup>10</sup> The DCR program was conceived as a stop-gap measure to "decompress" the military situation in Ituri following the signature of the Dar es Salaam accords on the 16th of May 2003, meetings of the Concerted Committee of Armed Groups, and the signature of the *Acte d'engagement* by all armed groups. The program is elaborated and executed by the DRC government's Conseil Technique de Planification et de Coordination (CTPC), in collaboration with the National Commission on Demobilisation and Reinsertion, with the technical and financial support of UNDP.

<sup>11</sup> MONUC interview November. Bunia

peacekeepers of the Moroccan contingent in front of the MONUC HQ. In protest, the District Commissioner abandoned his car at the place of the incident and left it in front of the MONUC HQ for two days running. This act of defiance gained the applause of Congolese on-lookers who criticised the contempt of MONUC for the local government authority. In the words of one member of the public: "If MONUC is here to help restore state authority in the country, and in Ituri in particular, how come its officials or representatives in Ituri seem to despise the government-appointed authorities they are supposed to support?"<sup>12</sup>

This incident was, in AIP's view, one of the small things that gnaw at MONUC's credibility. The success of this UN mission depends on a strong public image and close contact with the local community. Avoiding any behaviour or action that has the potential for alienating the population must be made a policy in order to protect the already battered public image of this rather well-meaning UN mission. As one Kinshasa based diplomat stated: " Even with the necessary mandate and sufficient resources, no peace-keeping mission can succeed without winning the hearts and minds of the population. The Monuc force has the capacity to consolidate the peace process in Ituri, but the Congolese must be convinced that this is not the same MONUC that did little to stop the massacres of Kisangani (2002)."<sup>13</sup>

► *Doubtful sustainability of the current good conduct of the FARDC in Ituri*

Congolese civilians from the Kivus have reported acts of banditry, violence against civilians, as well as extortion by Congolese armed groups claiming to be part of the "Integrated army." However, the first integrated brigade of the FARDC, trained in Kinsangani and deployed to Bunia three months ago, has demonstrated exemplary behaviour. It is doubtful that this "exemplary behaviour" will continue if the living conditions and pay of these troops are not improved. Complaints of harvesting farm produce have already been raised by a handful of women whose fields are near the Rwampara site, where the FARDC troops are barracked. The corrupt and unprofessional police force in Bunia is an example of what can become of a security force that is abandoned by the state.<sup>14</sup>

Arguably, the fear of triggering a response from the militiamen in Bunia town has contributed significantly to the positive attitude of the FARDC brigade. If these troops are deployed outside Bunia - as is planned - the likelihood of a rise in incidents is probable. This eventuality may furthermore put the FARDC on a collision course with the Ituri militias. If the credibility of FARDC troops begins to

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<sup>12</sup> Interviews Bunia November

<sup>13</sup> Interviews Kinshasa November

<sup>14</sup> On 17<sup>th</sup> November 36 suspects from the police cell in Bunia escaped. Although investigations are ongoing, the escape appears to have been well planned and once again exposes the meagre efforts to end the reign of impunity in Ituri.

erode through acts of banditry – as has happened in other parts of the country – the confidence of the population will snap and the militiamen will have good grounds for challenging the state army.

► *Erratic handling of the DCR programme by the Transitional Government*

On 12<sup>th</sup> December, the former Congolese Minister of Defence, Gen. Jean-Pierre Ondekane, visited Bunia, together with the Belgian Minister of Defence, Andre Flahaut. During the visit, Gen. Jean-Pierre Ondekane announced a government decree to appoint officials of the Ituri armed groups into the FARDC and ensure recognition of their military ranks. This decree has only just been promulgated, (after a year of government promises) leaving room for mistrust by these armed groups vis-à-vis the Transitional Government.

Gen. Jean Pierre Ondakane also controversially demanded that MONUC stop attacking the regroupment camps of the Ituri armed groups and forcing them into disarmament because, he argued, the process should be a voluntary one. Although MONUC claimed the attack it launched against the FAPC militia camp at Ndrele on 4<sup>th</sup> December was meant to facilitate investigations into allegations of human rights abuses, the corollary of the operation was that the Mahagi demobilisation transit site started receiving more militiamen than usual.

The MONUC operation helped break the grip the commanders had on their members and was a much needed impetus to the DCR process. The population of Mahagi voiced their support for the “heavy-handedness” of the MONUC operation and questioned why the government did not support this initiative to demilitarise the militiamen. As one Congolese Human rights NGO stated after visiting Mahagi, “Perhaps Kinshasa is not sufficiently informed about the real situation on the ground, especially with respect to the systematic exploitation, rape and abuse of the local population by these militia groups. It seems that the government has decided to dialogue with the militiamen, and has neglected dialogue with other parts of the population.”<sup>15</sup>

► *Wrangling within the Mambasa civil society*

For a while there has been wrangling over rights to land tenure and political positions in the Mambasa territory. The severity of the problem is only now coming to the fore, however, with a leadership split amongst civil society. Two groups are in contention: One group consider themselves indigenous or native to the region, while the other comes from the ‘Arabised’ part of the community who descend from Arab slave traders that came from Maniema Province long ago. Each group now have their separate civil society office. The tension within the Mambasa civil society

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<sup>15</sup> Email communication, Human Rights NGO in Mahagi, Dec 2004

could easily be manipulated by local, regional, or national stakeholders and eventually result in open conflict. The “lessons learnt” from Ituri and other conflict situations has shown that the use of minimal resources and political will in conflict prevention at the beginning of a dispute is a much better investment than conflict management...

## Triggers

### ► *Deliberate anti-international community propaganda*

On 16<sup>th</sup> November the chief of Mudzi-pela was assassinated amid rumours of an imminent attack on Bunia by the UPC-L militia. The assassination of this local leader, who was an ethnic Hema, contributed to the rising tension within Bunia. The UPC-L duly exploited the incident by saying that the recently arrived Moroccan contingent of MONUC was responsible. Despite the investigations that have been launched, the UPC-L has already convinced nearly all its membership that MONUC peacekeepers killed the local leader. The armed group has for some time been targeting its political propaganda against the international community in Ituri. Following the killing of the Mudzi-pela chief, there has been a sharp increase of attacks against MONUC patrols<sup>16</sup> on the road axes north of Bunia. This has resulted in the temporary suspension of humanitarian activities by some international agencies and generalised insecurity for civilians in Bunia and surrounding areas.

### ► *Emerging splits within the UPC higher ranks*

Recent fighting in Largu<sup>17</sup> northeast of Bunia has exposed splits within the UPC over their stance on the DCR programme. Following the announcement in early December of the former Minister of Defence to integrate members of the Ituri armed groups into the FARDC, the population has reported a decrease in harassment, and extortion in areas under UPC control. As one resident of Bunia stated “Perhaps they are readying themselves for integration into the national army, and no longer have the time to continue to harass the population.”

But several UPC-L “officers”, such as Commander Bosco Tanganda<sup>18</sup> (widely believed

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<sup>16</sup> On 16<sup>th</sup> November the Pakistan battalion of MONUC came under fire around Nizi, 45 Km north of Bunia. The following day, in another exchange of fire between a Pakistan battalion patrol and the UPC-L, two militiamen were killed and, according to AIP information, four AK 47 guns were recovered after a search was conducted in a nearby militia camp.

<sup>17</sup> Largu is located 100 Km northeast of Bunia and only 2 Km north of Drodoro, a Hema village that experienced carnage at the hands of FNI Lendus two years ago.

<sup>18</sup> Many testimonies collected indicate that Bosco was wounded in the scuffles that took place between his men and the alliance of the dissident UPC-L commanders and FNI elements. The fighting that took place in the Largu region on 12<sup>th</sup> December is reported to have left over 50 people dead according to unconfirmed reports. Largu is traditionally a predominantly Gegere township and currently is under the control of FNI elements who are reported to have caused serious damage to the town’s infrastructure, including the local hospital in nearby Drodoro. UPC-L militiamen allied to Bosco seem not to have put up a fight and instead simply withdrew as FNI elements took over the town without serious resistance.

to be a Rwandan national) are reported to be hostile to the whole DCR exercise. This opposition has prompted some UPC-L officers to seek an alliance with FNI elements. The disagreement amongst the UPC-L is said to have provided an opportunity for those supportive of the DCR process to get rid of Commander Bosco. According to one UPC supporter: "He [Commander Bosco] may have helped us in the past, but has always been viewed with suspicion; given the current threat of Rwanda to invade the DRC, he has become a liability to the movement. It is better to go through the Demobilisation program than to continue to fight."<sup>19</sup>

- *Unrest in the Tchomia and Kasenyi region*

There have been reports of rising tensions in Tchomia and Kasenyi linked to the sharing of the import tax revenues collected at the lake ports. Revenues may be as high as 50,000 USD per month.<sup>20</sup> In early 2004, the Tchomia-based wing of PUSIC entered into an agreement with the FNI elements based at Bogoro to give free passage to goods that arrive at the port. FNI had been receiving 25% of the import revenue collected everyday.

It is likely that the current leadership struggles within PUSIC, which controls the lake ports of Tchomia and Kasenyi, may lead to open conflict (within and between different groups) to control these strategic areas. On 20<sup>th</sup> December, PUSIC, announced that Mr. Floribert Kisémbó, who had been the Chairman of this armed group for a little over a year, was dismissed in favour of Mr. Deo Pimbo, who had been until then its Secretary General. In an interview over one week later, PUSIC militiamen stated that their commander was "Floribert Kisémbó." This could be analysed along two lines:

- 1) A manifestation of the lack of command structures of PUSIC (and the majority of armed groups operating in Ituri), and the lack of control of the leaders over their combatants.
- 2) A possible division within the group, which could lead to an eventual split in the group as has been witnessed countless times before in Ituri since 2000, and most recently in 2004 with the splitting of the UPC into two camps.

Either explanation indicates a continued lack of control of armed elements in the region, and the inevitable increase of insecurity for the local population.

As of the writing of this report, there have been a less than 20 children and about 30 adult combatants to enter into the disarmament camps in Kasenyi, about 55 Km east of Bunia on the shores of Lake Albert. At the onset of the program it was estimated that up to 2000 PUSIC combatants would transit through the Kasenyi

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<sup>19</sup> Interview Nairobi, December 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Telephone Interview Kampala, former District commissioner, estimate for revenues in 2002.



site.<sup>21</sup> During the months of November and December, it was reported that there were numerous cases of human rights abuses, extortion, and violence against civilians by armed men. The “peace dividend” of the establishment of the transitional government in Kinshasa in June 2003, as well as the hope of demilitarisation with the onset of the DCR program in Ituri in September 2004, has not yet had an effect on the prevailing insecurity within these areas of Ituri district. There is an urgent need to link the demilitarisation program with support for reconciliation between different communities.

- *Looming confrontation between ethnic Hema and Ngiti over Bogoro*

Bogoro is an important trading centre lying nearly halfway between Bunia town and Kasenyi. Before ethnic fighting erupted in Ituri five years ago, Bogoro was mainly inhabited by ethnic Hemas. At the height of the interethnic conflict in Ituri, mid

2002, the Ngiti militias of the FNI managed to drive Hemas out of Bogoro, sending them fleeing towards Bunia and the lakeside towns of Kasenyi and Tchomia. A war of words has already begun between the two communities in the



region. One PUSIC commander vowed to ‘liberate Bogoro from the Ngiti to let our communities return to their homes.’ And added that “until such a move is made we will not consider joining the DCR programme.” This opinion seems to be shared by many of the Hema combatants from the region.

Leaders of the FNI strongly assert that Bogoro is a traditional Ngiti village, which had been invaded by Hemas over the last years. The Ngiti militias are not only opposing any return of the Hemas to Bogoro, but some are also threatening to attack pre-emptively the Hemas towards Kasenyi, if they continue to insist on returning to Bogoro.

This is another potential hotspot to watch over the coming months, as well as another example of the need to increase linkage of inter-communitarian dialogue with the DCR program. Reconciliation between communities is dependent on disarmament, and disarmament will have limited results without reconciliation between different communities. <sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Interviews UN officials, and DCR operational guideline August 2004

<sup>22</sup> This problematic is thoroughly explored in Bendana, Alejandro. “Peace, Justice and Arms in Columbia.”

► *Unrest in the Mahagi region between FAPC and FNI militiamen*

In December fresh clashes were reported again between elements of the FAPC and FNI militiamen, two armed groups in the Jaliasiga region, a few kilometres from



Mahagi in northeastern Ituri near the Ugandan border. FAPC militiamen, who fled the Ndrele camp after MONUC attacked and destroyed it, are reportedly harassing, extorting, raping and killing innocent civilians, in the areas around Mahagi.<sup>23</sup> For example, on 17<sup>th</sup> December a group of fugitive and no longer controllable FAPC militiamen attacked an open market in a village called Kudikoka, 18Km from Mahagi. They looted, at gunpoint, villagers of their belongings

before the Nepalese battalion of MONUC intervened to put down the militiamen.

► *Insecurity still persists in Bunia town itself*

During the last part of 2004, there has been a reported rise in incidents of violence, criminality, and banditry in Bunia town. In parts of Bunia, such as Lembabo and Saiyo, mandatory contributions of 0.5\$ per weekend and per household are still being made by armed groups. UPC-L militiamen have systematically threatened anyone that refuses to pay up. On the night of 3<sup>d</sup> December a young lady was gang-raped and then strangled with her own underwear behind the Bunia post office building only 400m from the MONUC HQ. The same week, a group of armed UPC elements stormed the residential quarters in a church compound and looted the church and its residents.<sup>24</sup> Both incidents took place within what is meant to be a security perimeter in the town. By the time MONUC peacekeepers arrived the perpetrators had long gone. During an interview, one victim of an attack summed up the frustration of many Iturians: "I thought they [MONUC] were here to protect us. But each time there is a problem, they arrive after the fact. If that is a UN chapter seven mission, then maybe we are better without them."

During the last week of 2004, insecurity has largely decreased within Bunia town, although there has been little improvement of the situation in the outlying areas of Ituri.

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Presentation at Roundtable in Sando, Sweden, "The Challenges of preparing for peace in Chechnya. June2003

<sup>23</sup> Interviews MONUC, Human rights section. December 2004

<sup>24</sup> MONUC press briefing December 2004

## PEACE INDICATORS

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### Processes

#### ► *Belgian Delegation to Ituri*

In November, a two-week visit was made by a team of Belgian military instructors to Bunia to assess the progress made by the Belgian-trained, first integrated Brigade of the FARDC. The Belgian military team was the first non-MONUC foreign force to pay a visit to Ituri since the Interim European Multinational Force (IEMF) completed its three-month mission in Bunia in September 2003. The visit was an encouraging sign for the peace process in Ituri as it served as a reminder for the population of Bunia when the IEMF intervened in June 2003 to restore order in the town. The Belgian mission also helped to assure the deployment of the remaining FARDC troops stranded in Kisangani. Now that all of the planned FARDC soldiers are in Bunia, it is necessary that they become more proactive and work with the MONUC to better protect the population, who is starting to lose confidence in the capacity of these soldiers to restore order. (See AIP Ituri updates October and November.)

#### ► *Lukewarm response by militias to national military integration proposal*

The desire expressed by the Minister of Defence (see above) to have 50 militiamen from each armed group in Ituri integrated into the FARDC received a positive response from all factions, but to date the only soldiers to have volunteered have been from the FNI/FRPI.<sup>25</sup> The other groups have kept their troops away from the DCR transit sites making it technically impossible for them to integrate into the army. The UPC-L has not submitted to demobilise 50 combatants through the DCR process, justifying their non-adherence by their status as a “recognised political party” and not a militia movement. (See October Ituri Update). In reality the UPC-L is an armed group, while UPC-L, as a political party exists only in the minds of those who came up with the idea.

#### ► *FARDC redeployment outside the security perimeter in Bunia*

Beginning December, FARDC troops started redeploying in Bunia town outside the security perimeter and in positions formerly manned by MONUC peacekeepers. The locations included the dreaded Mudzi-pela, a hotspot in Bunia where the UPC-L is most active. The local population is so far visibly happy with the redeployment and no incident of clashes between the FARDC troops and the UPC-L militias has been reported so far. Although FARDC troops are not yet covering all 12

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<sup>25</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> November at the Kpandroma transit site 115 ex-combatants from FNI/FRPI presented themselves for demobilisation through the DCR programme. While 25 of them volunteered for integration into the army, the rest opted for returning to civilian life. On the same day, the leader of the FNI/FRPI, Mr. Floribert Njabu, made a public announcement on radio Okapi calling for an end of conflict in Ituri.

neighbourhoods of Bunia town, the sounds of gunshots at night have drastically decreased where they are deployed. It can only be assumed that this is a positive outcome for the overall peace process.

► *Start of the integration of Ituri armed groups into the national army.*

On 10<sup>th</sup> December it was announced by radio Okapi, the MONUC public information tool, that a total of 40 militiamen from three different armed groups in Ituri had been flown out of Bunia to Kitona in the Bas-Congo province of western DRC where military training and integration into the national army is taking place. This is a positive move, especially if it could be continued with further combatants from Ituri.

## **STAKEHOLDERS**

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### **THE KINSHASA GOVERNMENT**

The Transitional Government's engagement in restoring peace and order in Ituri remains, to say the least, very limited. Until Kinshasa decides to take decisive steps, either to negotiate or to impose peace in Ituri, the relative peace that has been achieved may quickly unravel. Although wide scale ethnic killings are absent, insecurity still prevails across Ituri. The lack of commitment by the Transitional Government to the Ituri peace process had been exemplified by its slowness; or rather lack of political will, to complete the deployment of the remaining Belgian-trained FARDC troops from Kisangani. Had it not been for the generosity of the Belgian Government, who helped transport the troops to Bunia, they would have remained stranded there almost indefinitely. This is an unfortunate indicator of the Transitional Government's attitude to peacebuilding and the restoration of state authority in Ituri.

### **THE ITURI ARMED GROUPS**

#### *UPC-L*

On 17<sup>th</sup> November, the UPC-L held a ceremony in Bunia for the official installation of the party's "Federal Committee for Ituri." However, these cosmetic acts of political transformation by this armed group have not been sufficient for changing the fundamentally armed character of its operations. Any stakeholder to the peace process in Ituri who would deal with the UPC-L as a political party at this stage would only be doing a disservice to the cause of peacebuilding in Ituri.

#### *FNI/FRPI*

Acts of violence and harassment, including rapes, against the civilian population and further attacks on members of the international NGOs continue to demonstrate that the rhetoric of peace from this armed group's leadership is miles away from

the actual behaviour of their militiamen on the ground.

## **MONUC**

MONUC's tough attitude towards Ituri armed groups, especially UPC-L and FAPC, during the month of December has been commendable. However, after closing in on the FAPC camp in Ndrele and demanding the militiamen to surrender, it is difficult to understand why MONUC troops would let a bulk of them escape with their weapons and ammunition before storming the camp. As a result of the inconclusive action of MONUC, the FAPC militiamen from the Ndrele camp are now marauding around the whole area around Mahagi terrorising the civilian population.

## **CONCLUSION**

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The period from November to December has seen the political context in the DRC severely tested by renewed instability in the Kivus, which has in turn affected the peace process in Ituri. Conflict indicators are flashing all over the territory and it would require just a small trigger for the situation to degenerate into full-scale conflict once more. Some urgent measures need to be taken at this stage to salvage the gains that have been realized. The following issues urgently need to be addressed.

### 1. Army integration

Even when there have been offers of integration into the national army, most of the armed groups in Ituri have been hesitant to demobilise their forces. Most of the former armed groups now in the Transitional government have also been hesitant to demobilise the majority of their forces to keep their options open with the elections scheduled for June of 2005. This state of affairs would explain the reports that there has been a recent increase in financial and technical backing from personalities in the Transitional Government in Kinshasa for different armed movements in Ituri. It appears that politicians in and outside Ituri want to keep the UPC-L, FAPC, FNI/FPRI, APC, and PUSIC, as well as smaller armed groups such as the FPDC or UPC-K, as viable fallback options in the event of further instability in the run up to, or after, the elections.

### 2. The DCR programme: two steps forward, how many steps back?

The high hopes of the population for the demilitarisation of Ituri through the DRC program have been largely shattered. Responsibility for this state of affair is due to actions at the local, national, and international levels. The individuals involved in the implementation of the DRC programme, however, should publicly acknowledge its operational shortcomings. By recognising difficulties, it will be possible to take the necessary corrective measures, these include the following challenges:

- *Voluntary demobilisation:* Demobilization (or disarmament) on a purely voluntary basis is not only ineffective but can't be sustained over the long term. When the voluntary nature of demobilisation reaches its limit, as it seems to have now in Ituri and did long ago in the Kivus, it is necessary to change strategies. MONUC's strike on the Ndrele FAPC camp was a major impetus for increased participation in the DCR process and provides important lessons.
- *The government's limited capacity to integrate combatants into the national army.* The DCR program is supposed to orientate former combatants towards "reinsertion" into the civilian sector or "re-integration" into the national unified army. After over a year of promises by representatives of the TNG, the first step was taken in December with the relocation of 40 combatants to Bas-Congo to be trained and integrated into the national army. Other combatants who wish to be integrated into the national army are instructed to enter into the DCR program, where they are disarmed and then orientated to the Integrated Military Structure (SMI). The exact nature of the ensuing process is still unclear to militia members as well as local observers. It is clear that the willingness as well as the capacity of the government to integrate a more than symbolic number of these combatants is exceedingly limited. In the meantime, those who wish to integrate into the national army are left in a state of limbo, and are reluctant to disarm without a guarantee that the national government will be able to integrate them into the army.
- *The lack of livelihoods options for former combatants:* For those combatants who wish to re-integrate into their communities as civilians, there are limited choices that are available. While there has been an increase of over 200% in international aid to Ituri since May of 2003, there are still enormous needs, especially in outlying areas of the district. The contribution of the international community is far from meeting the needs of these communities, while the implication of the national government to facilitate the reintegration of former combatants has been minimal at best and oftentimes counterproductive.
- *Unclear messages by the national government towards Militia commanders.* Different representatives from Kinshasa have promised that the leaders of the militia groups will be given posts in either the army or the government if they agree to disarm their forces. After over one year of promises, none of the leaders were appointed to a post within the transitional government. They had no rationale to commit to disarmament of their forces until they have guarantees from the national government. The recently promulgated decree needs to be quickly implemented, in order to show that the national government is committed, in actions as well as words, to the pacification of this troubled

district. It is the hope of local and international observers that the nomination of militia commanders to official posts will facilitate the process of disarmament, and eventually the normalization of relations between different communities. <sup>26</sup>

### 3. Insecurity for the civilian population

The peacebuilding process in Ituri, especially in terms of community reconstruction and reconciliation, cannot make progress if the security environment for the civilian population does not improve significantly. The Transitional Government and the international community need to double their effort to discourage militiamen in Ituri from harassing and raping the civilian population. Only then will the people begin to reconstruct meaningfully their destroyed communities and their broken intercommunity relations.

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<sup>26</sup> Interviews Nairobi, Kinshasa, Goma, Brussels, December 2004

## List of Acronyms

- CONADER** National Commission on Demobilisation and Reintegration  
**DCR** Disarmament and Community Reinsertion  
**DRC** Democratic Republic of Congo  
**FARDC** Congolese Armed Forces  
**FAPC** Popular Armed Forces for the Congo  
**FNI** Nationalist and Integrationist Front  
**FRPI** Revolutionary Front for Ituri  
**FLC** Congolese Liberation Forces (MLC)  
**IDP** Internally Displaced Person  
**IIA** Ituri Interim Administration  
**MONUC** United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo  
**PUSIC** Party for Unity and Safeguard of the Integrity of Congo  
**RCD/Goma** Congolese Rally for Democracy/Goma  
**RCD/ML** Congolese Rally for Democracy/Liberation Movement  
**UPC** Union of Congolese Patriots

*Africa Initiative Program (AIP) is a registered charity with offices in Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is composed of Congolese, Kenyan, and other peace-building activists. AIP is currently working on a two year peace-building program in Ituri facilitating dialogue between representatives of different communities and supporting local peace-building initiatives. This has included work with representatives of the Ituri Administration, women's groups, and traditional leaders. Each month, a situation update is produced which highlights the political situation in Ituri and current possibilities for inter-communitarian dialogue.*

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