WORLD WATCH RESEARCH

Democratic Republic of Congo: Mapping the conflict

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1. Introduction

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is located in central Africa and is among the largest countries in Africa after Algeria and Sudan. Its capital city is Kinshasa, where all national institutions, such as the headquarters of the judiciary (i.e. the Supreme Court) and the National Assembly are based. The country covers an area of 2,345,000 square kilometers and has a 45 km long strip of coastline in the west which provides the country's access to the Atlantic Ocean at the port in the city of Matadi. The eastern border has a number of African great lakes: Lake Albert located between DRC and Uganda; Lake Kivu located between DRC and Rwanda; Lake Moero located between DRC and Zambia.

The country shares borders with 9 countries namely Angola, Zambia, Congo Brazzaville, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Burundi. Its current population is just over 84 million, 95.3% of which is Christian according to World Christian Database estimates for 2018. French is the official language; four others national languages are spoken: Lingala, Swahili, Kikongo and Tshiluba.[1]

2. Background

Evidence of settlements in DRC reach back 80.000 years. In 1885, the country became a Belgian colony (Congo Free State) and was considered King Leopold II's private property. Following reports of widespread murder and torture of the local population in the rubber plantations, the Belgian government then took over. The country's name was changed to Belgian Congo which it kept until 1960 when the Congo gained it independence. It is important to mention that during this period under Belgian rule there were many Christian organizations active among the Congolese people. DRC became independent on 30 June 1960 but the country was unstable given that tribal leaders had considerably more power than the central government.

Patrice Lumumba was the first prime minister who had the difficult task of restoring order with the support of the Soviet Union. This did not work well due to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviets. Colonel Mobutu took over power in 1965 with the US support and renamed the country Zaire. Mobutu brought in an ideology that he called "Retour à L'authenticité" and encouraged the changing of Western names into African or Zairian names. His own name, Joseph Mobutu, was changed to Mobutu Sese seko and similar changes were applied to every citizen. He ruled as dictator, repressing any kind of opposition from 1980 up to 1990. His power started declining in April 1990 and he agreed to a multi-party system to share government power, with himself remaining head of state.

On 27 May 1997, Laurent Desire Kabila seized power. He was the leader of the rebel group Alliance of Democratic Forces for Liberation (ADFL) which had an armed wing mostly of Tutsi origin from Rwanda and was supported by Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. Fighting began in the

[1] https://www.britannica.com/place/Democratic-Republic-of-the-Congo/People

eastern part of DRC, but in August 1998 a disagreement between allies caused a further conflict to break out, mainly in North Kivu and South Kivu.

In January 2001, Laurent Desire Kabila was assassinated and Joseph Kabila (the son of the former president, although some dispute this) took office and is now the current president of DRC. He successfully negotiated the withdrawal of the Rwandan forces occupying the eastern region of the country in October 2002. An agreement was signed by the remaining parties to the conflict to end hostilities in order to establish a government of national unity. In July 2003 a transnational government was established with Joseph Kabila as president together with four vice-presidents representing the former government, former rebel groups and the political opposition.[2] One of these vice-presidents - Jean Pierre Gombo - was sentenced in 2016 by the International Criminal Court to 18 years imprisonment for crimes against humanity[3] committed in 2002-2003 in Central Africa Republic.

Joseph Kabila organized and won elections in 2006 for a 5 years term. In 2011 elections were held but the opposition disputed the outcome. However, the Supreme Court confirmed Joseph Kabila as winner. With 17 years in power, he is trying to unify the country but the eastern region remains unstable with numerous rebel groups creating unrest and making the country a scene of humanitarian disaster despite the presence of United Nations peace-keeping troops. With up to around six million dead and over two million displaced through the fighting in 1998-2003, some sources consider the DRC civil war to be the deadliest conflict since World War II.

2.1 The socio-economic situation of DRC

The socio-economic situation in DRC is characterized by a high incidence of poverty. This is partly attributable to the armed conflict taking place in the eastern part of the country that has spilled over from neighboring Uganda and Rwanda but also partly attributable to the ongoing instability and civil war between government troops and rebel groups. The sustained level of violence has caused massive infrastructural damage, internal displacement and loss of lives. As one of the largest countries in Africa, DRC has vast resources. According to the latest World Bank report, with fewer than 40% of the nearly 77 million inhabitants live in urban areas, 80 million hectares of arable land and over 1,100 available minerals and precious metals, DRC has the potential to become one of the richest countries on the African Continent and a driver of African growth if it could overcome its political instability. [4]

After an increasing to almost 9% in the 2013-2014 period, the GDP growth rate (excluding inflation) decreased to 6.9% in 2015, then to 2.4% in 2016, its lowest point since 2001. This slump is mainly due to declining prices and a shrinking global demand for raw materials exported by the country, particularly of copper and cobalt, which account for 80% of its export revenue.[5] This economic shock led to deterioration in external accounts as well as a 31% drop in the exchange rate in 2016 of the Congolese franc against the dollar, which fueled runaway inflation of almost

[2] http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/congo_droc.htm
[3] https://www.icc-cpi.int/car/bemba
[4] http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/drc/overview, last updated 5 December 2017.
[5] Ibid

24%. In 2017, growth is expected to reach 2.6%, driven by the moderate increase in commodity prices and national mining production. However, the national currency is expected to continue its decline against the dollar as the rate of inflation increases.

Public finances also deteriorated in 2016, with a growing fiscal deficit of -1.6% of GDP against -0.2% in 2015. The drop in export revenue was reflected in a decrease in state revenue. Lacking access to domestic and international financial markets, the government had to drastically reduce public expenditure to contain the deficit and limit monetary financing by the Central Bank of the Congo.

The government has launched sectorial reforms to strengthen governance and transparency in the extractive industries (forestry, mining, and oil sectors) and to improve the business climate. Currently, almost all contracts signed by the government are accessible to the public. DRC participates in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and regularly publishes reports on revenues from natural resources. However, systematizing the procedures necessary for a competitive process in awarding mining, oil, and forestry contracts requires additional efforts on the part of the government, which also needs to solve the issue of inflation in order to strengthen the DRC currency. Despite all DRC's resources, it is one of the poorest countries in the world.

2.2. The political situation of DRC

The DRC is still recovering from a series of conflicts that broke out in the 1990s creating protracted economic and social chaos. Joseph Kabila has officially been head of state since 2001. Presidential and parliamentary elections planned initially for November 2016 were delayed due to an outdated electoral register. Efforts to defuse the political crisis into which the country plunged were made by the African Union Facilitator Mr. Edem Kodjo [6] and Congolese episcopal leaders acting as mediators between the government and opposition parties. A new agreement, signed on 31 December 2016 provided for a transition period of one year during which power was to be exercised jointly by President Joseph Kabila and the opposition, until presidential elections could be held in late 2017.

The agreement included a commitment by President Kabila to adhere to the constitutional two-term limit and not undertake a revision or change of the Constitution.[7] However, this agreement never entered into force. Since signing the agreement, the president has nominated two prime ministers who have not been recognized by the opposition. Furthermore, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) decided that elections could not take place in late 2017 as the planned revision of the electoral register was not completed.

[6] http://www.africanews.com/2016/10/21/drc-dialogue-consensus-ki-moon-commends-edem-kodjo//

[7] https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/report-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/

It is evident that President Kabila and his political party are using all means to remain in power.[8] Delaying tactics are possible due to the fact that parliament and senate members are mainly from the president's own political party and because President Kabila can exert a certain level of influence on the judiciary[9] . An illustration of this is the Constitutional Court's ruling on 11 May 2017: General elections are now scheduled to be held on 23 December 2018. This remains uncertain since lessons learned in the past show that promises are often broken.[10] It would appear that President Kabila is neither willing to relinquish power nor to hold elections in order to give Congolese citizens the chance to choose their president.[11]

3. Conflict in the eastern region of DRC

The DRC's current conflict is extremely complex, and any simplification may be somewhat misleading. It is in fact a convergence of several conflicts, on local, national and regional levels, which are focused primarily in the eastern half of the country. It has its origins a) in terms of citizenship rights and land ownership, in the legacy of the forced migration of Rwandan-speaking people under Belgian colonialism; b) in internal divisions exacerbated by decades of misrule under US-backed President Mobutu; c) in decades of ethnic conflict and refugee flows culminating in the 1994 Rwandan genocide; and d) in the spillover of five foreign civil wars deep into DRC territory.

It would not be worth carrying out any type of analysis of the conflict in the eastern part of DRC (including its consequences on the lives of inhabitants of that region) without first mentioning the genesis of the conflict, the parties involved together with their motivation and interests. From the 1970s up until 1994 DRC (Zaire) was considered one of the most stable and safe countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The starting point to be considered is the 1994 Rwandan genocide in which 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutus were killed and millions of Rwandans had to seek refuge in eastern DRC.[12] That might have been the end of a great tragedy; however, with the civilians pouring into Zaire came their political leaders, defeated soldiers and Hutu militiamen (the Interahamwe) who had led the genocide back in Rwanda. Their presence, and Mobutu's continuing support for his old Hutu allies, sowed the seeds of much of the upheaval that was to come (including the Zairian leader's own downfall) as the new Tutsi-led government in Rwanda vowed not to stand idly by while another genocide was being prepared next door.[13] Since the 1994 genocide, the presence of Interahamwe in DRC territory constitutes a serious threat to the current Rwandan government. In 1996 Rwanda and Uganda invaded DRC, aiming to root out the remaining perpetrators of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. A coalition of Rwandan and Ugandan armies, together with forces belonging to the Congolese opposition leader Lauren

[8] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/12/03/will-congo-vote-in-2016/?noredirect=on&utm_term=
[9] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-congo-politics-idUSKBN12H28E
[10] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/uncertainty-drc-sets-election-date-replace-kabila-171109074747003.html
[11] https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/257-time-concerted-action-dr-congo
[12] http://www.easterncongo.org/about-drc/history-of-the-conflict
[13] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/may/16/congo

Desire Kabila, defeated Mobutu's regime in 1997. Kabila became president and in 1998 he ordered his allies to vacate eastern DRC to avoid any annexation of the mineral-rich territory by the two countries who happened to be powerful in the region. In 1998, rebels backed by Rwanda and Uganda rose up against Kabila and advanced on Kinshasa and took control of eastern DRC.[14] Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola sent troops to help Kabila. In 2002, Joseph Kabila concluded a deal with rebel groups for sharing government power. However, despite the signing of a peace deal and the formation of a transitional government in 2003, weak governance and institutions, along with corruption and an absence of rule of law, have contributed to ongoing violence perpetrated by armed groups against civilians in the eastern region.

3.1 Parties to the conflict

Within the context of armed conflict going in the eastern of Congo, there are numerous internal and external rebel groups operating in the region, some of whom are based in neighboring countries Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. Below is an overview of these armed groups as listed by the UN:

3.1.1 Foreign armed groups

- The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)

This is a Ugandan rebel group based along the Ruwenzori Mountains of eastern DRC. Most of its members are Islamists who want to establish Sharia law in Uganda. The ADF was formed around 1998 by a merger of various streams of discontented sectors of Ugandan society, which felt alienated after the overthrow of Idi Amin. The group appears to be receiving external funding from unknown sources. In June 2010, the FARDC (see below) launched an attack called "Operation Ruwenzori" against the ADF. The ADF currently numbers approximately 500 combatants but the high level of secrecy in the organization and its compartmentalized structure make it difficult to ascertain its overall strength. Since 2001, the Uganda government offered an "Amnesty and Reinsertion program" for all members of the ADF[15].

- The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)

This is a Ugandan rebel group currently based along the northern border areas of DRC as well as in eastern Central African Republic. The LRA was created in 1997 by remnants of the Ugandan spiritual rebel movement under Alice Lakwena and the remnants of the Ugandan army overthrown by President Yoweri Museveni. Primarily individuals from the Acholi tribe in northern Uganda formed the group. Between 1994 and 2004, the LRA was based in southern Sudan but after the peace negotiations that led to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) taking over control of southern Sudan, the group moved its base to DRC in September 2005. The LRA remained relatively quiet in the DRC until it began a violent expansion campaign in September 2008. This campaign forced the armies of the DRC, Uganda and the SPLA IN Southern Sudan to launch a joint military operation against them in December 2008. The LRA is made up

[14] http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13283212
[15] https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/foreign-armed-groups

of hard-core Ugandan combatants as well as recruits forcefully abducted from the DRC, South Sudan and the Central African Republic[16].

- Force démocratique de liberation du Rwanda (FDLR)

Founded by some of the perpetrators of the genocide that occurred in 1994 in Rwanda, this group is led by Major-General Mudacumura, indicted by the International Criminal Court. He would face charges if arrested and be brought to justice.[17] According to a UN report, the FDLR currently operates in eastern DRC and Katanga Province. It is considered to be the largest rebel group operating there and its current strength is estimated to be 2000 combatants.[18] The group continues to be involved in human rights violations and the illicit exploitation of natural resources over the last 15-20 years. FDLR remains active in parts of Masisi, Walikale, Southern Lubero and Rutshuru territories.[19]

- The National Liberation Forces (FNL)

This is a Burundian rebel group originally formed in 1985 as the military wing of a Hutu-led rebel group called the PALIPEHUTU. Both the PALIPEHUTU and the FNL signed a peace agreement in September 2006 and became simply FNL. While most of the FNL integrated into the national Burundian army after the elections in mid-2010, the remnants restarted rebel activities. They later started infiltrating the Ruzizi plains and Lake Tanganyika and crossed into South Kivu where they created bases to fight the Burundian armed forces. The FNL currently appears to be in an alliance with Mai Mai Yakutumba and FDLR in South Kivu.

3.1.2 National armed groups

- The M23 group

This group was named after a peace agreement signed with the Congolese government on 23 March 2009 when they were fighting as part of a group calling itself the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). Many CNDP fighters were integrated into the Congolese army. Part of the rebels belong to the minority Tutsi ethnic group and have close ties to the Tutsi in neighboring Rwanda. Their rebellion began in April 2012 when they mutinied. At that time, the CNDP was led by commander by the name of Bosco Ntaganda who is currently facing charges at The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague in the Netherlands for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity carried out in the eastern part of DRC in 2002 and 2003. After he turned himself in to the United States embassy in Rwanda, he was extradited to The Hague. The United Nations is accusing him and other senior commanders of summary executions, rape and the use of child soldiers.[20]

According to the Enough Project cited by IRIN,[21] M23 troops were estimated to be 1700-2000 in number. (It should also be mentioned that two other rebel group leaders - Thomas Lubanga Dylo

[16] Ibid
[17] https://www.icc-cpi.int/drc/mudacumura
[18] https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/foreign-armed-groups
[19] http://www.irinnews.org/report/99037/briefing-armed-groups-eastern-drc
[20] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/congos-m23-reb
[21] http://www.irinnews.org/report/99037/briefing-armed-groups-eastern-drc

and Germain Katanga - have been arrested, found guilty by the International Criminal Court and sentenced to 14 and 12 years imprisonment respectively.[22]

- Mai Mai Hilaire (Union pour la rehabilitation de la Democratie du Congo-URDC)

An M23 ally, this group is named after his leader (a FARDC defector) General Paluku Kombi Hilaire. It is made up of around 300 fighters, predominantly from Nande Community[23]. The group has not only alliance with M23 but also with Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and Mai Mai Morgan. The group operates in Beni Territory in North Kivu where the majority of the population is of Nande ethnicity. The group is involved in the kidnapping of adult and children, forcing them into labor.

- Raia Mutomboki

Another M23 ally. Established in 2005 in South Kivu's Shabunda Territory by Congolese army defector Pastor Jean Musumbu in response to FDLR massacres. It comprises various groups headed by local leaders and FARDC deserters.

3.1.3 Smaller militant groups

The groups listed below are small units in the region which have established various alliances. It should be noted that these groups are allied according to their ethnic affinity and interests. Those that are dominated by Hutu ethnicity are mostly allied to the Congolese army in some cases. In other cases they are allied to Mai Mai groups considered as local groups pursuing the defense of their territory and fighting against predominantly Tutsi rebel groups. Another characteristic of these groups is that they occupy areas rich in mineral resources and raise funds by exploiting those resources, taking advantage of the lawlessness allowed by the national government. They conduct human-trafficking activities and - by receiving assistance from foreign sources - through the illicit export of diverse mineral resources such as Coltan Gold. This involves cross-border movement into Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and, in some cases, also Tanzania. As a result, they are sufficiently equipped, armed and motivated. In addition to launching attacks against civilians and military targets, they have also shown capability at controlling and administering territory under their control.

- Local Defense Forces Busumba (LDF)

This rebel group was established by an influential Hutu figure within North Kivu. With over 50 men and reportedly allied to M23, it assists ex-CNDP combatants in taking over land and expanding M23's influence in Masisi.

- Mai Mai Sheka (Nduma Defence of Congo - NDC)

Formed in 2009 by long-time minerals businessman Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka in North Kivu's Walikale Territory, Mai Mai Sheka has 150-180 men, mainly army deserters and youths. Human rights groups accuse the NDC rebels of killings, mass rape, mutilations and child abduction. The

[22] https://www.icc-cpi.int/drc/lubanga
[23] https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/briefing-armed-groups-eastern-drc

worst abuses allegedly occurred between August 2012 and November 2013 in and around Pinga – a town bordering the Walikale and Masisi territories.[24]

- Mai Mai Kifuafa

Mainly from the Batembo, Bahunde and Bayanga communities, this group is active in southern Masisi Territory (North Kivu). The group claims to be protecting "indigenous" interests from purportedly foreign Rwandophone groups. During the 1998-2003 civil war it fought the Rwandan-backed Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie rebellion, and its successor CNDP, and has fought against RCD-Goma (which ruled North Kivu as a proxy of the Rwandan government from 1998-2003).

- FDC (Front de defense du Congo)

Originally a local defense force against the FDLR and FARDC, FDC was established in 2012 under the overall command of "General" Butu Luanda, a former CNDP officer. Luanda worked closely with M23's Ntaganda, who supplied him with financial support, weapons and ammunition.

- UPCP (Union des Patriotes Congolais pour la Paix)

Established in 2012, UPCP is a coalition of Mai Mai groups and FARDC defectors led by "General" Kakule Vasaka Sikulikyolo Lafontaine. It is comprised of 500-600 mostly ethnic Nande men and is active around North Kivu's Lubero Territory. UPCP is reportedly aiming to form a coalition of armed groups to topple the DRC government.[25]

- MAC (Mouvement d'Action pour le Changement)

This group is led Lt-Col. Bwira, a former FARDC commander from the Hunde community and has 80-300 mostly ethnic Hunde and Nyanga fighters. It collaborates with other armed groups such as APCLS, FARDC and Nyatura. Its main aim is to counter M23's advance into Masisi.

- Mai Mai Morgan

Mai Mai Morgan is led by Paul Sadala, alias Morgan, and operates in Orientale Province's Mambasa and Bafwasende territories. It comprises several dozen combatants, who operate in small groups out of camps which relocate regularly, according to the UN report.[26]

- Mai Mai Yakutumba

Founded in 2007, Mai Mai Yakutumba is named after its military leader "Major-General" William Amuri Yakutumba. Its political wing, Parti pour l'Action et la Reconstruction du Congo (PARC), is led by Raphael Looba Undji. Yakutumba and Undji are both university-educated intellectuals, according to the Congo Siasa blog.

[24] https://www.voanews.com/a/drc-mai-mai-leader-6jan15/2587649.html
[25] https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/27/dr-congo-students-schools-risk-conflict-zones
[26] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-congodemocratic-militias/congo-militia-leader-morgan-surrenders-government-idUSBREA3D1D820140414

- Mai Mai Nyantura

Mai Mai Nyatura is a Congolese Hutu militia founded in 2010. It collaborates with FDLR and FARDC fighting against M23. The group claims to protect Hutu interests against ex-CNDP officers and M23.

- FDIPC

Formed in April 2013, this group is a loosely structured self-defense group of Hutu youth in Rutshuru.[27]

- APCLS (The Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo)

APCLS is an armed group in Masisi territory. They hail largely from the Hunde ethnic community, who are native to Masisi but are outnumbered by the Hutu community. With a strong anti-Rwandan and anti-Tutsi bias, the group's main enemies are the M23 (successor to CNDP and RDC; largely Tutsi).[28]

- COGAI/ Force de resistance patriotique en Ituri (FRPI)

Established in May 2012, COGAI is an umbrella organization formed to unite Ituri militias. The group was recently renamed MRPC.

- KATA KATANGA

Kata Katanga ("cut off Katanga" in Swahili) is a loosely structured armed group comprising individuals and groups campaigning for the secession of DRC's southeastern Katanga Province.

- Force de Defense Nationale (FDN)

This group was created by former FARDC soldiers who defected from the national army in 2010, over perceived marginalization. The 160-strong group operates in eastern Walikale Territory, according to the Enough Project, and is headed by "Colonel" Akilimali Luendo, alias Akilo, and "Colonel" Jeremy.

- M18

M18 is a new rebel group in Orientale Province who have been clashing with some militias there and forcing people to flee.[29]

- M26[30]

M26, created on 26 October 2012, is comprised of veterans of Nyatura who refused to be integrated into FARDC. Alongside two other armed groups (FDLR and a faction of Mai Mai Pareco), it has been trying to gain recruits in the Mpati area of North Kivu.

[27] https://enoughproject.org/files/CongoArmedActors_Table_August2013.pdf
[28] https://muellertimo.com/2014/09/12/what-happened-to-the-apcls-rebel-group-in-2014/
[29] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-congo-rebels/eastern-congo-rebels-aim-to-march-on-kinshasa-sp
[30] https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/briefing-armed-groups-eastern-drc

4. Foreign countries involved in DRC

It is without doubt that every war has multiple causes and eastern Congo is no exception. Numerous internal and international drivers have exacerbated tensions and widened regional divisions. Warped and exploitative regional relationships have been one of the most critical factors in DRC becoming the site of the world's deadliest war over the past two decades. Several of DRC's neighbors have been deeply involved in the war, and the Congolese government's state of corruption and bad governance have created conditions in which the army and a host of militias have operated with impunity and destabilized eastern Congo. Each of the players, the DRC government, the numerous rebel groups (and their often opposing factions), the local militias, and the eight foreign countries who have intervened militarily, has or has had different objectives.[31] The Rwandan, Uganda and Burundian governments invaded DRC motivated by security, economic and political interests, as discussed below.

4.1 Security interests

This section applies to all the foreign countries mentioned in the paragraph above. Some of the armed groups cited in the course of this report are operating and conducting attacks from DRC to those countries and vice-versa. It is in the interest of security that these countries seek to dismantle and weaken foreign armed groups threatening their territory. An example is the security threat posed by the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) based in eastern Congo.[32]

The current Rwandan government (which defeated the regime that committed the 1994 genocide and subsequently took power in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda) believes that as long as any of these rebels continue to operate in DRC with supporters in various countries around the world, they pose a great threat – indeed the threat is greater than their current troop numbers as they continue to be motivated by the ideology that fueled the genocide.[33] The same applies to the Burundian government and the Forces Nationales de Liberation (FNL).

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) is an Islamist rebel group operating in north-eastern Rwenzori in DRC Congo. Its leader is Jamil Mukulu, a Christian who converted to Islam Muslim and founded the ADF in 1995 with a view to establishing an Islamic state in Uganda.[34] The ADF poses a permanent threat to the Ugandan government which provoked the latter into invading DRC in pursuit of rebels.[35] However, the International Court of justice has ruled that Uganda was guilty of occupying Ituri (a region in DRC), guilty of illegal use of force, and guilty of violating international human rights and looting between August and June 2003.[36]

[31] https://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/71
[32] https://enoughproject.org/files/Rwanda%E2%80%99s%20Stake%20in%20Congo%20-%20Understanding%20Interests%20to%20Achieve%20Peace.pdf
[33] Ibid
[34] https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/briefing-armed-groups-eastern-drc
[35] http://www.africanews.com/2017/12/27/ugandan-army-kills-100-adf-rebels-in-dr-congo//
[36] http://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/116

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is a Ugandan rebel group currently based along the northern border areas of DRC as well as in eastern Central African Republic[37].It poses a threat to the Ugandan government.

All the foreign armed groups in DRC have a long history of creating instability and spawning reactionary armed groups in eastern Congo as well as in their countries of origin.

4.2 Economic interests

Neighboring countries such as Rwanda also have economic interests in DRC's natural resources, land, and cross border trade[38] and has led to illicit activities.[39] Rwanda has allegedly benefited significantly from smugglers of tin, tantalum, and tungsten.[40] The Rwandan government denies such interests in its invasion of eastern DRC. Despite this, one area in Kigali (the capital city of Rwanda) is nicknamed "Merci Congo". It is alleged that this Kigali high-rise development is built with money from eastern DRC. Rwanda has large tin deposits and approximately 400 mines in operation. However, this industry is dwarfed by eastern DRC's which has approximately 1,500 to 2,000 mines. UN reports have documented the smuggling of minerals from DRC to Rwanda.[41]

Uganda also has an interest in pursuing ADF and LRA armed rebel groups into Congo - apparently for security reasons. Between 1996 and 2003 Uganda intervened in DRC and has supported numerous rebel groups there. There are definite economic interests in the background. Kampala's interest is twofold:[42] On one hand, there are indeed lingering security concerns about anti-Uganda rebels across the border; but on the other hand Uganda profits from DRC's extensive mineral wealth by allowing pro-Uganda militant groups to smuggle Congolese natural resources into Uganda for export.

4.3 Political interests

The political interests depend on each country's goals and agenda. From an international community perspective, the main political interest of foreign countries involved in conflict in DRC would be a multilateral peace agreement for the region. For Rwanda, the political interest is focused on advocating for Tutsi in DRC's eastern territory. The Rwandan government has stated on several occasions that it wants to prevent discrimination and violence against Tutsis in Congo.[43] However there is evidence that Rwanda is supporting numerous Congolese militias.

[37] https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/foreign-armed-groups
[38] https://enoughproject.org/files/Rwanda%E2%80%99s%20Stake%20in%20Congo%20-%20Understanding%20Interests%20to%20Achieve%20Peace.pdf
[39] Ibid
[40] https://enoughproject.org/files/Rwanda%E2%80%99s%20Stake%20in%20Congo%20-%20Understanding%20Interests%20to%20Achieve%20Peace.pdf
[41] ibid
[42] https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/ugandas-strategic-interests-democratic-republic-congo
[43] https://enoughproject.org/files/Rwanda%E2%80%99s%20Stake%20in%20Congo%20-%20Understanding%20Interests%20to%20Achieve%20Peace.pdf

5. Implications for the population in the region

5.1 The impact on the population in general

The conflict in eastern DRC, which together with disease and famine caused the death of millions of people, ended in 2003. Violence did not stop then however and it has continued to be fueled by the following factors: The absence of state authorities to uphold the rule of law; bad governance; negative external influences and disputes over natural resources; and the control of trade routes, markets and land issues. There are a considerable number of residual and splinter armed groups of various profiles and capacities in eastern DRC. Some of them have become criminal gangs sharing weapons. Among these groups, several of them are foreign and have - or once had - a political agenda in their country of origin (FNL from Burundi, FDLR from Rwanda, ADF and LRA from Uganda). Other groups are community-based self-defense groups, like the various Mai-Mai entities and Raia Mutomboki. There are also armed groups with a strong ethnic-based profile opposing each other as they attempt to secure their socio-economic territory and survival.

The conflict in eastern DRC has affected social and human development in general and has had a particular impact on education and health. It has also had an impact on vulnerable groups in society, especially women, children and the youth. The conflict has also affected hard and soft infrastructure, as well as the utilization of installed infrastructure and the costs of infrastructure services.[44] Armed conflict has caused a deterioration of living conditions in most of the provinces and have increased economic vulnerability of households and caused displacement[45].

One manifestation of the impact of conflict on women in the DRC is increased maternal mortality. In addition to deaths directly related to the fighting, the increase in maternal mortality is attributable to the deterioration of living conditions due to population displacement within the country (IDPs) and across borders (refugees).[46] Throughout the region, sexual violence and rape has been common. Child labor and other forms of exploitation have been occurring, in addition to the direct involvement of children as combatants. By creating insecurity and massive displacement of the population, the wars have left many children with no protection, as they were separated from their families.[47]

5.2 The impact on the Christian community

The Democratic Republic of Congo has a considerable religious diversity and Christianity has a long history in DRC dating back to 1484[48]. In the eastern region of DRC, the Christian population has suffered attacks launched by Muslim Defense International (MDI) formerly known as

[44] https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/conflits_in_drc_eng_25sept_rev1.pdf
[45] Ibid
[46] https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/conflits_in_drc_eng_25sept_rev1.pdf
[47] https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AFR62/034/2003/en/
[48] https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-congo-kinshasa.html

Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF).[49] An Open Doors researcher stated in 2016: "The MDI has been repeatedly attacking the mostly Christian population in these parts of DRC for years. Kidnapping and murder are common. Although their successes ebb and flow, they continue to display surprising strength and have found a firm foothold where they can prepare for jihad into the Lakes Region, the heart of Africa."[50]

The local population in eastern DRC is overwhelmingly Christian (95.8%) and the impact on them has been immense.[51] The total death toll in the country is well over 6 million with almost 70% of these deaths occuring in the eastern part of the country and the rest in Kasai Province. Hand in hand with the armed conflict there has been colossal displacement of people forced to flee their homes and properties. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) the number of IDPs reached 4,480,000 as of 31 December 2017.[52] Due to the continual dangers, Christians have often been unable to gather as congregations to pray and worship together. The suffering has been compounded by the destruction of churches, training centers and Christian hospitals.[53]

6. Conclusion

The conflict in DRC is complex and protracted. It is a combination of armed conflict and violence with a high incidence of human rights violations and population movements. Despite considerable investment by the international community in supporting peace and security in DRC, the country is still far from overcoming the impact of the past wars and hence from reaching peace and stability. Bad governance and systemic institutional failure are the main causes of the conflicts: The state has failed to perform its fundamental function of delivering services, securing law and order and defending the country's interests at regional and global levels. It has failed to establish and maintain institutions at national and local levels that can manage conflicts among groups. DRC has enormous potential for becoming an engine of growth and integration in the region by capitalizing on its massive resource endowment and its geo-strategic position. As a people, Congolese leaders need strong political will in order to establish an agenda for a substantial and durable peace for the country. By creating an environment of strong security, peace, rule of law and stability these are factors that would attract investors and finally there will be economic growth. In a reassuring environment, Christians and non-Christians would be able to live in freedom and peace.

[49] https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/02/the-war-on-christianity-in-the-congo/
[50] Ibid
[51] Ibid
[52] http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/drc
[53] https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/878181/islamic-extremist-terrorists-christians-attacked-persecuted-dr-congo-beni-caliphate-isis