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## Africa Meeting Summary

# Prospects for Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region in 2013

Ambassador Frank De Coninck

Belgian Special Envoy for the Great Lakes

Chair: Lord McConnell

APPG on the Great Lakes Region

9 January 2013

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## INTRODUCTION

This document is a summary of a roundtable meeting held at Chatham House on 9 January 2013. The meeting discussed the question: What are the prospects for peace and security in the Great Lakes region in 2013.

Efforts to foster peace and security in the Great Lakes region, which has been home to recurring conflicts that have killed tens of thousands and displaced millions of others, have once again been tested by recent developments in eastern DR Congo.

The meeting included a 20-minute presentation by Ambassador Frank De Coninck, Belgian Special Envoy for the Great Lakes and former Ambassador to Rwanda and to the DRC, on the security situation and prospects for peace in the region. This was followed by a general discussion.

The presentation was on the record; however the subsequent discussion was under the Chatham House Rule. The views expressed are those of the participants and do not represent those of Chatham House. The following summary is intended to serve as an *aide-mémoire* for those who took part and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

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## **AMBASSADOR DE CONINCK**

The ambassador began his presentation by saying that he would focus on present issues and assume that the historical context was common knowledge. He provided a simplified overview of what he saw as the main historical aspects of the conflict:

- The weakness of the Congolese state. In particular the weakness of the army, police and justice system.
- Institutional shortcomings. Especially those that have resulted in a blurred political situation lacking any legitimacy.
- The geographic location of the eastern DRC resulting in the Rwandophone presence in the east. This is an historic presence that was enlarged following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

The ambassador noted that the formation of the M23 was only the latest development in a series of conflicts and grievances that go back to 2000 and were in themselves definitive of the conflict in the 2000s.

The ambassador identified some necessary prerequisites for stability. Firstly, there is a need to stop the present rebellion. This is a necessary but not sufficient condition for long term stability. Secondly, the ambassador argued that the regularity and nature of these cyclical rebellions demonstrates that there are deep-rooted causes and grievances. He stated the need to identify the underlying causes that are leading to these repeated crises. Thirdly, he said that the way out of the present situation is to encourage the cooperation and integration of all those concerned.

Elaborating on the first of these requirements, the ambassador gave an overview of prospects for dealing with the M23.

He said that the M23 is currently the master of the battlefield. It is the dominant military force in the area in which it operates. In this area there are no Congolese troops and the situation is very volatile. In this domain it is able to take the initiative in order to enhance its negotiating position.

From a diplomatic point of view, the ambassador stated that the M23 is much stronger as a military force than it is as a diplomatic one. He said that the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the latest summit of which was taking place in Kampala, Uganda, at the time of the meeting, ought to result in a technical agreement covering better pay and conditions. But the ambassador argued that this would simply require the implementation of the 2009 agreement. The position of the Southern African Development

Community (SADC) on the situation is that the M23 are a 'negative force' creating instability. This complements the UN Security Council Resolution 2076 adopted in November 2012, which condemned the M23 rebellion.

In order to tackle these issues and adopt these approaches the ambassador stated the need to address the dichotomy between amnesty and impunity. A lasting settlement requires an element of reconciliation. Some actors see this as an amnesty and regard it as a critical factor. This is the view taken by many regional governments. However, others regard such a stance as a granting of impunity. The international community regards such impunity as a causal factor of the repeated problems and continuing violence.

Furthermore, any process needs to address the question: What will happen to the rebels? One of the rebels' stated aims is reintegration into the army. However, the ambassador argued that the Congolese do not want this. Many other countries view this issue as a technocratic problem. As such, the solution would be the renegotiation of contracts. But some of the rebels have already been reintegrated two or three times. This is problematic, and one of the main causes of this repeated breakdown of reintegration efforts is that many of the rebels only want to be reintegrated at face value and they do not want to sign up to all of the conditions of the army. The main cause of friction is the issue of deployment outside of the Kivu provinces. Many of the rebels do not want to be reintegrated into the army if it means that they are deployed elsewhere in the country.

The ambassador also pointed out that the M23 are only one of up to a dozen armed groups operating in the eastern DRC. The ambassador estimated that several of these groups claim between 4,000 and 7,000 armed members. This contributes to severe destabilization in the region.

The ambassador said that one of the things that is new to the current discussions is the willingness of SADC to put together an international neutral force. Such a force could be incorporated within the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and would involve creating a peacemaking element within the operational peace keeping force. This would be similar to what existed in Katanga in the 1960s.

It is not possible to discuss the current rebellion without addressing the supposed support of the M23 from other countries, in particular Rwanda. The ambassador described this involvement as part of an external international irritation. It is particularly problematic in the context of Rwanda's new position as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. He went on to say that many people thought that this support had ended in 2009, but its

continuation is now becoming problematic for Rwanda with, for example, the withdrawal of aid.

The ambassador said that one of the most important medium-term aspects is the question of how to deal with the root causes. One of the most detrimental root causes is the absence of security sector reform. The Congolese army is now no longer part of the solution; it is a part of the problem. There is a need for thorough security sector reform; however this is hampered by a lack of political will and coordination.

Looking forward the ambassador stated that the events in Goma in November 2012 were a wake-up call, and that the crisis ought to be turned into an opportunity. The summit in Kampala in January 2013 was expected to resolve a number of the technical points, and the ongoing talks in Addis Ababa were expected to lay the foundations for broadening the mandate of MONUSCO to incorporate peace making initiatives.

The ambassador argued that a UN special envoy could be part of a solution. He went on to say that the UN secretary general now agrees with this. Although a special envoy is not the solution in its entirety, it would at least have a mandate. It could accompany a programme of army reform; it could potentially involve the formation of a 'Group of Wise Men'; and it could be a platform to target root causes.

The ambassador concluded that the current initiatives are at the very least creating a sense of direction and things are advancing in a positive manner.

## DISCUSSION

It was questioned whether the reintegration process of rebels could work, especially considering the historical lack of success of such measures in the area.

The presentation was challenged on the basis that it was dismissive of the political demands of the M23, focussing on the military side of the problem rather than the political aspect.

On this point the discussion centred on the primary political objective of the M23: reintegration. It was stated that this has been wanted by all rebel movements since 2002. It was argued that the broader demands of the M23 are symptomatic of the rebel group expanding and trying to be recognized as a revolutionary movement, which it is not. It was further argued that the M23 is in fact a mutiny, and as such political issues should not be discussed.

It was stated that political progress in Kinshasa has been relatively good since 2009. While there are still issues, progress has been made, which was seen to be encouraging.

The army was a major discussion point. The EU has trained three battalions of the Armed Forces of DR Congo (FARDC), but it was argued that more needs to be done, and there needs to be knowledge of the context in which these operations take place. There was general agreement on the army being one of the root causes of this perpetual conflict, although to what extent it is the main driving force was more contested.

It was argued that the FARDC suffers from incompetence, mixed loyalty, corruption, an absence of logistical capability, and an absence of leadership. These problems represent a structural deficiency. The army has men and it has weapons, however it lacks the coherent structure required to operationalize these resources. This has resulted in the army being unable to maintain a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence.

On the other hand, it was argued that this 'non-existent' army is actually convenient for many people in the DRC. This is because the army is associated with corruption and power grabbing.

In response to this the international community was called upon to play a greater role. It was stated that there are six or seven countries that have strong relationships with the DRC and this group needs to co-ordinate more. Up until now Kinshasa has preferred to communicate bilaterally but in order for international support to be most effective it needs to operate on a more multilateral basis.

While there have been rumours that the situation may result in the secession of the Kivus, it was generally agreed that the situation does not present any threat to the territorial boundaries of the DRC. South Sudan is not setting a precedent on this. Furthermore, it was argued that Rwandan involvement does not indicate a long term objective. Rwanda is reacting to the problems and opportunities in the field, rather than operating under a long term goal of territorial expansion. This was demonstrated in the First and Second Congo Wars where, it was argued, Kigali had no initial intention of getting to Kinshasa. The administration of the Kivu regions under a shared sovereignty or condominium agreement was seen as very unlikely as was an ambiguous situation involving multiple negotiations with both governments.

Regarding the role of the UN special envoy it was stated that the amount of difference such an envoy would make would depend on the mandate that they are given.

The root causes of the problem and their relevance were heavily debated. It was stated that the central problem is the weakness of the Congolese state. One crucial aspect of this is the fact that the army is non functional and there was a call for multilateral international engagement in fixing this problem as the current negotiations and peace efforts do not directly address this. It was argued that the reformation of the army is vital, because the army is essential in providing state protection to Rwandophone elements in the Kivus.

There was some debate over whether or not the M23 should be part of negotiations. It was argued that they should because they are an effective armed force and there has been a cyclical re-emergence of these groups because they have societal support bases. However this was countered by assertions that, while these groups do continue to re-emerge, their numbers fall dramatically each time. The Banyamulenge were greater in number than the RDC, which in turn was larger than the CNDP, which was larger than the M23. This diminishing size and support may be as a result of Rwandophone Congolese in the Kivu provinces now associating themselves more with Kinshasa than they do Kigali. It was also argued that there may be a 'comrade in arms' attitude or a certain level of 'osmosis' between the M23 and Rwanda, but the rebellion is not a direct arm of Kigali. There was a general consensus that the underlying factor was uncertainty over citizenship and status.

On the subject of a potential peacemaking force there was discussion over issues such as the lack of clarity of the source of funding, what the mandate would be and under whose command it would operate, how a peacemaking

force would interact with a peacekeeping force, and where the troops would come from seeing as the only current interested party is Tanzania. South Africa pledged 200 troops, but then deployed them to the Central African Republic.