

Keynote address by Alan Doss, Special Representative of the Secretary General for the Democratic Republic of Congo to the States at Regional Risk (SAAR) Conference

“The Great Lakes Region: Beyond Emergency Responses”  
Bujumbura, Burundi: 4-5 June 2009

Distinguished Colleagues and Friends,

At the outset let me express my thanks and appreciation to Emory University and the University of Burundi together with the Carnegie Corporation and the United States Institute of Peace for having had the vision – and indeed the courage – to organize and fund this Conference.

Last December, when early notices went out to participants, the title of this conference might have struck some of you as wishful thinking but events have taken some momentous turns since then. I would like to review some of those developments and the implications for post emergency responses.

I do so however with a note of two of caution: Firstly, as we all know, a week is a long time in politics – and especially in the DRC. So what is a truism today may well prove a false premise tomorrow. And secondly I (am) keenly aware that I am in the presence of many distinguished scholars of central Africa who have spent a lifetime studying, researching and writing about this part of the world. My knowledge is much more superficial based as it is on the experience of running development and peace operations in the Congo. This gives me a front row seat in the cinema of events but not necessarily the depth and perspective to fully appreciate and understand the unfolding drama. Fortunately you are here to add those dimensions.

Colleagues and Friends,

When today’s discussion points were framed Laurent Kkunda and the CNDP were locked in combat with the FARDC together with the Mayi-Mayi, PARECO and other armed groups. There was no inkling of a ‘palace revolt’ in the CNDP. There was no hint that senior officers in the CNDP would declare an end to their rebellion. Who would have guessed at the CNDP’s willingness to integrate their forces so quickly with those of the FARDC and to become a political party?

Who would have imagined the rapprochement between Kinshasa and Kigali, which triggered the joint operation against the FDLR? And who would have envisioned Congolese, Ugandan and Sudanese forces pursuing a joint operation against the LRA?

Bold political decisions have brought a sea of change in the regional dynamics. There are many uncertainties with all of this but there is palpable hope that the region is at a turning point. Within the DRC we can see outlines of potential solutions to problems that have festered for years. The integration of CNDP, Mayi-Mayi and PARECO militias into the FARDC is well underway even though we recognize – as past experience has vividly

demonstrated – that this process is fraught with difficulties. The agreement between the Congolese Government, the CNDP and other armed groups in North and South Kivu that was concluded on 23 March, has opened the door to the transformation of these groups into political movements if they so wish. Discussions are underway through a tripartite commission to prepare for the return of thousands of refugees from Rwanda. In some areas of North Kivu the internally displaced are returning home. The Amnesty Law agreed last year at the Goma conference has been passed by parliament. The operations against the FDLR continue. Reconstruction is starting with roads and other critical infrastructure.

Of course it would be extremely naive to believe that all the old antagonism and antipathies have been resolved in a few short months. This is why MONUC has received an expanded mandate from the Security Council to support and reinforce the peace process, including, if need be, through robust action; and this is why we are now directing most of our peacekeeping resources to eastern Congo.

Our first priority is protection. Rooting out the FDLR and other armed groups will not be easy and unless there are further surprises, it will not happen overnight. These operations are not without humanitarian risk. We are doing our utmost to minimize these risks through “pre-emptive protection”, which means not only putting military pressure on the FDLR but also helping the FARDC to improve its performance, including the conduct and discipline of its armed forces. The same applies for other operations being conducted against the LRA and the remaining militia elements in Ituri.

But let us also recognize that there are great risks for the people of the Kivus if no solution is found to the problem of the FDLR: the risk of renewed tensions between the DRC and Rwanda; the risk that the FDLR reasserts its control over large areas of the Kivus and mutates into a criminal mafia that perpetuates violence and impunity; and the risk that others will seek to emulate the FDLR for economic and political gain.

The Congolese security forces are a key part of the solution. Without effective and accountable military and police the security and stability of the state will always be at risk.

Unfortunately, the recent absorption of former adversaries under the flag of the FARDC has highlighted some old deficiencies. The government is not yet adequately meeting its payroll and supply obligations towards its forces. There are no barracks for the tens of thousands of troops now stationed in the Kivus. Too often we hear of the FARDC troops abusing their power with impunity. If the Army is to neutralize the FDLR (or any other armed group for that matter) and maintain stability, it will need the support and cooperation of the population at large.

As a part of the effort to improve the FARDC’s performance, MONUC provides food and other support to FARDC troops when they are in training or joint operations against the FDLR and other armed groups. This support is not a blank check and we will not assist commanders or units that commit egregious offences. Our message is simple: for

the Congo to win the battle for peace and stability, the army and police must respect human rights and gain the trust of those they are supposed to protect. This means ending impunity within the security forces and progressively removing those elements that have consistently abused power. This will take time, but I can say that of late we have seen a new openness on the part of the Government, to recognize and deal with the problem.

Over the last year, MONUC has rethought its strategies and has reconfigured its footprint in the Kivus. Last year, we were trying to shore up the cease-fire and press for the disengagement of the FARDC and a multitude of armed adversaries. Today, the focus is on the integration of those former adversaries and the protection of civilians from reprisal attacks and the crossfire of combat.

This requires a high degree of mobility and quick reaction capacity that is not usual for traditional peacekeeping. We have multiplied our operational bases in North and South Kivu and parts of Province Orientale, and we have intensified our patrols and escorts for humanitarian assistance. We have also reinforced MONUC civilian and military cooperation by deploying multi-disciplinary Joint Protection Teams in the most sensitive and vulnerable areas. The exchange of information with the civilian populations has increased our understanding of local dynamics and enhanced our military and humanitarian preventive and response capacity. But given the complexities of the terrain and the dispersed locations of the FDLR and LRA there is still much more to be done.

MONUC will most likely remain the largest UN peacekeeping operation throughout 2009. Nevertheless, I believe we can now look forward to a cautious drawn down of the UN's decade-long peacekeeping engagement in the DRC.

The Security Council has asked us to focus our operational activities in the east. In fact ninety five percent of our peacekeepers and an increasing portion of our civilian resources are already concentrated in the east. We are already planning the hand-over, wherever feasible, of our civilian activities to the provincial and UN partners in the western part of the country.

In the east, we will continue to concentrate on civilian protection; the integration of armed elements willing to serve in the national army and the demobilization of those wishing to return to civilian life. We will continue to facilitate the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, and to support community reconciliation and the extension of State authority. We expect that with additional peacekeeping resources promised by the Security Council, we can strengthen the FARDC sufficiently to prevent armed groups from trying to reoccupy their old haunts.

There are currently no serious security threats from armed groups in the west but there are many other complex challenges. These include the reforms needed to improve governance and enhance service delivery to the population bearing in mind that in some Western areas, social indicators are as bad if not worse than in the Kivus.

The capacity of provincial governments is weak and the planned decentralization is unlikely to meet the constitutional deadline of 2010. Security sector reform is still at an early age. Sadly corruption is rife in many public services. Unfortunately the global economic crisis has intensified the pressures on the DRC and the Government has yet to reach the HIPIC completion point to become eligible for debt rescheduling with the IMF.

Some of these challenges are part of MONUC's mandate, but most of them require long-term engagement of the Government and its international partners, going beyond expected lifetime of the Mission.

Colleagues and Friends,

The central theme of our conversation today is a hopeful one. Hope for a peaceful, prosperous future for the region taking the DRC and its neighbors "Beyond Emergency Responses". This is a reasonable expectation but without a threshold level of State authority and rule of law in the DRC, and in the surrounding region, the prospect of recurrent emergency responses will continue to hover over the Great Lakes. Everyone has a stake in seeing this does not happen.

If we are to get beyond emergency responses, the international community must assist the DRC to build credible State institutions capable of safeguarding the country's resources and the rights and interests of its people. Above all we must work with the Congo and its neighbors to help prevent and resolve conflict – whether it is home grown or cross border in origin.

This is an especially complicated task in the Kivus, where violence between and among communities has been a recurring tragedy. Understanding and dealing with the dynamics of violence is a critical part of that task. But I am constantly reminded of how intractable and deeply entrenched are the underlying causes of this violence, some of which – such as the competition for land rights – stretch back many decades.

Breaking this recurring cycle of violence will not be easy. There are no quick fixes or instant answers. Part of the answer will lie in locally based mechanisms that can promote dialogue and reconciliation among the communities that live in a common geographic space.

Part of it will result from extending the authority of the state, which must uphold and enforce the rule of law, human rights and especially the protection of women and girls against sexual violence. Part of it must come from ending the illegal exploitation of natural resources through incentive-based regulation and international cooperation to enforce that regulation. Part of it will flow from economic regeneration and growth based on mutually acceptable and beneficial agreements among the communities and states of the Great Lakes. And a vital part of the answer lies in urgent job creation for young people to reduce the attraction of armed groups that thrive in times of chaos and collapse.

Above all else, however, the governments and peoples of the region must come together to put the spoilers out of business and to prevent violence from spreading across their frontiers. To achieve that, we must all work to reinforce and revitalize regional institutions like those represented here today, to help keep the neighborhood in check and its interests in balance. Resolution 1856 of the Security Council, which extended MONUC's mandate last December, was very clear on this point: MONUC alone will not solve the problems of eastern Congo.

So it seems appropriate for me to end these remarks by lobbing this ball into your court – the regional court – along with congratulations to all who have contributed to peace and stayed the course. We have seen in Congo in particular, how essential regional commitment is to progress. We have seen it in the role of former Presidents Mkapa and Obasanjo. We have seen it in the solidarity of the African Union. We have seen it in the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region which has its Executive Secretariat in this city. We have also seen it in the revitalization of the Economic Community of the Great Lakes as another avenue for moving beyond emergency responses to regional cooperation and economic growth. It is also visible in the Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources.

Colleagues and Friends,

History casts a long shadow, which we cannot ignore. But we can, with good will, honesty, realism and determination, surmount its often baleful legacy. This is our common challenge; this is our common responsibility: and this must be our common endeavor.

Thank you.