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Between a Rock and a Hard Place: LRA Attacks and Congolese Army Abuses in Northeastern Congo

Enough Project Activist Brief

Ledio Cakaj March 2010

The Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA, continues to pose a severe threat to the civilian population in northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Assigned to protect their citizens from these dangers and fight the LRA, the Congolese national army, or FARDC, has shown little interest in either task, and actually has exacerbated the problem. In Enough's latest strategy paper, Field Researcher Ledio Cakaj argues that the United Nations's Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo, or MONUC, should step up its efforts to protect civilians in this area.

The year 2009 saw a continuation of violence by the LRA. The patterns of these attacks reflect deliberate tactics on the part of the fighting force as it has reconstituted itself as a regional threat. The majority of the violence, which includes deliberate mutilation, murder, child and adult abductions, and rape, have taken place in and around a region referred to as the "triangle of death."

While the LRA continues to unleash a reign of terror on civilians, FARDC has utterly failed to protect the local population from attacks, making the situation worse. Soldiers are often unpaid, unfed, and undisciplined, a deadly combination that occasionally rivals that of the LRA. Theft, rape, murder, and severe beatings all remain tools used by FARDC, most often for the express purpose of lining their pockets. The Congolese army has spectacularly failed in waging any sort of offensive against the LRA. In some cases, FARDC has even gone through the trouble of dismantling local self-defense forces, the only native groups that put up meaningful resistance to the LRA, making life easier for the rebels.

The movement of some LRA elements into Darfur should alarm policy makers and spark revitalized international efforts to deal with the militia. But these efforts should not neglect the LRA's continuing ability to wreak havoc in northeastern Congo. MONUC is stretched too thin to adequately protect civilians in the vast region where the LRA operates. U.N. presence, especially in the areas worst affected by LRA violence, is crucial. Unsurprisingly, LRA attacks happen most frequently in places with no peacekeepers. MONUC should conduct frequent and routine joint patrols with FARDC soldiers. Joint patrols help enormously in terms of protection and evidence demonstrates that Congolese soldiers behave better when in the company of peacekeepers.

Enough's recommendations

With the LRA replenishing its ranks and close to being able to establish a relatively safe haven near the borders of Sudan and Central African Republic, and the egregious behavior of the Congolese army effectively aiding the rebels, it's time to up the ante:

1. MONUC should develop a comprehensive civilian protection strategy that should prioritize more effective use of existing resources, especially greater cooperation with the Congolese army that is more rigorously conditioned.
2. Far greater coordination between the U.N. missions in Congo, southern Sudan, and the Central African Republic should be encouraged with the authority of the Security Council.

Take action

Tell Congress that it is time to end the 20-year reign of terror by the Lords Resistance Army in Central Africa. Contact your Senators and Representatives to co-sponsor the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009 (S. 1067/H.R. 2478). This bill is the most widely co-sponsored legislation focused on sub-Saharan Africa in modern history. Continue to visit Enough's [LRA Take Action page](#) for updates on the legislation and for opportunities to take action.

Additionally, call the State Department comment line at 202-647-4000 and ask that stopping the reign of the LRA be a top priority.

Enough is a project of the Center for American Progress to end genocide and crimes against humanity. Founded in 2007, Enough focuses on the crises in Sudan, Chad, eastern Congo, northern Uganda, and Somalia. Enough's strategy papers and briefings provide sharp field analysis and targeted policy recommendations based on a "3P" crisis response strategy: promoting durable peace, providing civilian protection, and punishing perpetrators of atrocities. Enough works with concerned citizens, advocates, and policy makers to prevent, mitigate, and resolve these crises. To learn more about Enough and what you can do to help, go to www.enoughproject.org.

