

# **HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE FOR STATE FOREIGN OPERATIONS ON AFRICA: GREAT LAKES, SUDAN, AND THE HORN MARCH 12, 2009**

## **Testimony of John Prendergast**

Thank you, Congresswoman Lowey and members of the Subcommittee, for this opportunity to testify on U.S. policy toward Sudan and the Great Lakes region, and to speak in favor of a step-change in U.S. attention to these crises.

East and central Africa is battered by an arch of chronic conflict that stretches from Somalia to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Congo and Sudan alone account for nearly eight million deaths due to the legacy of war in the past two decades. Although the United States has provided billions of dollars in humanitarian aid, support for peacekeeping missions, and electoral assistance, this aid has not yet succeeded in altering the dynamics that have kept this region dangerously destabilized.

At this moment, unprecedented windows of opportunity have opened in both Sudan and eastern Congo, but they coexist with dire dangers for the civilian populations that have suffered enough from genocide and crimes against humanity. In Sudan, the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for President Omar al-Bashir will make peace more likely, not less. But the decision by Khartoum to cynically deny its own citizens lifesaving aid threatens a profound humanitarian emergency and demands a robust and decisive response from the international community — and the Obama administration in particular.

The opportunities and challenges in the Great Lakes region are no less urgent. Sudden and unexpected political deals among central African governments have led to a reconfiguration of regional politics and joint military operations against both the LRA and the FDLR, two of the world's worst human rights abusers. The United States has played a crucial role in bringing about this transformation, but unless it uses its weight to significantly alter the conduct of these operations, they will only further harm the civilian populations that we have a responsibility to protect.

To exploit these opportunities, the Obama administration will need to shift U.S. policy from simply managing the symptoms of Africa's biggest wars to ending these conflicts. The good news is that a strategic investment in competent, sustained conflict resolution is among the most cost-effective decisions that we can make. A surge of diplomatic support for peace efforts, when backed by focused leverage that draws from our robust defense and development capabilities, can transform the logic of regional combatants from war to peace.

### *I. Sudan*

The issuance of an arrest warrant for Sudan's sitting head of state for crimes against humanity offers the Obama administration a chance to catalyze multilateral efforts to bring about a solution to Sudan's decades-long cycle of warfare. One of the crucial missing ingredients to conflict

resolution efforts has been some form of accountability for the horrific crimes against humanity that have been perpetrated by the warring parties in Sudan, primarily the Khartoum regime. Peace without justice in Sudan would only bring an illusion of stability without addressing the primary forces driving the conflict.

To ensure that any potential leadership change within the regime will actually produce meaningful movement toward peace on the ground, the international community must fashion a firm and coordinated peace strategy conditioned on actions rather than words and policies rather than personalities.

This must begin with a simple and direct message to Khartoum: Access for relief agencies needs to be immediately restored, or the international community will use all necessary means to restore this access. However this immediate message must be linked to a broader strategy to make the pursuit of peace the most attractive option for the National Congress Party. This should be developed through effective multilateral diplomacy, a willingness to call Bashir's bluff, and practical steps to increase pressure on Khartoum in pursuit of a comprehensive peace deal that includes both Darfur and revitalized CPA implementation.

The genocide in Darfur has diverted international focus and funds away from implementation of the CPA. Eager to gain humanitarian access and stop the slaughter in Darfur, international actors became less willing to press the NCP to fulfill its CPA commitments. This is sadly ironic given that the root causes of the conflict in Darfur mirror those that drove the North-South conflict, and that President Bashir's decision to cut off humanitarian aid to Darfur as part of his military and political strategy is a strategy that he used repeatedly during the earlier war.

It is imperative that President Barack Obama confront Khartoum's intransigence with a forceful and coordinated diplomatic response. But to maximize the effectiveness of such a response will require adroit use of all of the elements of the foreign policy toolkit. Appropriations has a crucial role to play in this effort. We recommend the following:

**Funding for Special Envoy for Sudan and team.** Naming a senior special envoy will signal a serious and sustained high-level commitment to both Darfur and the CPA. But this person will need a full team of staff based in the region, adequately funded to rapidly engage with all parties.

**Peace dividends for the people of Sudan.** Sizeable sums have already been spent, especially in South Sudan, but with little in the way of a tangible peace dividend. The United States should support spending on infrastructure, especially roads, education, and healthcare, including temporary salary support for teachers, doctors, and other critical service providers.

**Security sector reform and support.** Several areas of support will be critical to shoring up security in southern Sudan in advance of elections and the referendum. This includes an air defense system for the south, training to both the SPLA and local security forces to curb conflict among heavily armed civilian populations, and efforts to transform Joint Integrated Units (JIUs) which are currently dysfunctional and destabilizing, as indicated by events in Abyei and Malakal.

**Support to Government of Southern Sudan to build capacity and fight corruption.** Severe shortages of human capital and growing evidence of corruption are costing the Government of South Sudan its credibility. For wider reconstruction efforts to bear fruit, the U.S. must invest in building capacity and battling corruption at all levels of government in the South.

**Elections and democratic development that delivers.** Elections are a key component of the CPA and a huge element of U.S. support to Sudan. The \$95 million in U.S. assistance is third only to Iraq and Afghanistan. But these elections are a logistical nightmare that could consolidate the peace or help unravel it. This money must be spent more effectively and wisely.

## *II. Eastern Congo and the Great Lakes Region*

With U.S. planning and logistical support, Central African governments have recently joined forces against the LRA and the FDLR, two militias that have plagued this region over the past 15 years, committing some of the world's worst human rights abuses with little international cost for their actions. The LRA is a Ugandan militia specializing in the abduction of children as soldiers and sex slaves. The FDLR, made up of many of the same forces that conducted Rwanda's genocide in 1994, uses mass rape as its war tactic of choice. Both have hidden in the vast forests of Congo to elude any form of accountability while they continue their predatory practices. Moreover, their continued activities have contributed to ongoing instability in the region and exacerbated a range of conflicts at the local, national, and regional levels.

Political deals among Central African governments, which the U.S. helped broker, have led to joint military operations against both of these groups. In the case of the LRA, the Ugandan, Congolese and South Sudanese governments cooperated in planning an attack on the LRA's headquarters in a Congolese game park late in 2008. However, advance warning plus poor execution gave the LRA leadership time to escape, and they have since gone on trademark killing and abduction spree, leaving over 1,300 dead in the absence of any regional or international plan to protect civilians.

In the FDLR's case, the Rwandan and Congolese governments struck a deal in January, which allowed Rwanda's forces to enter Congo and undertake operations with Congolese soldiers against the FDLR. In return, Rwanda arrested rebel leader Laurent Nkunda who had led a brutal offensive and proven a nagging thorn in the side of the fragile Congolese government led by President Joseph Kabila.

The ensuing military operation was developed behind closed doors by Rwandan and Congolese military leaders with little consideration given to the protection of civilians. Particularly galling was the collaboration with Nkunda's replacement, Bosco Ntaganda, who is wanted by the ICC for war crimes. Human Rights Watch recently documented his direct involvement in CNDP's massacre of at least 150 civilians in the town of Kiwanja, in North Kivu. His participation in the operation is a clear threat to civilians. Meanwhile, the United Nations peacekeeping force, MONUC, has been largely left largely in the dark, as it was in the case of the LRA operations.

Rwanda has declared the operation against the FDLR a success and claims to have removed most of its military forces from eastern Congo, but this has more to do with mollifying broad Congolese antipathy toward Rwandan forces than actual victory against the FDLR. In fact, the withdrawal of Rwandan forces is likely to leave Congolese civilians further exposed to retaliation by the FDLR, who have already begun targeting these populations with sexual violence and other atrocities. Only a hundred deaths have been reported so far, but that is just the tip of the iceberg.

Immediate action is required to increase the transparency and efficacy of the operation, ensure accountability, and more effectively focus the international community on a shared core objective: the elimination of the FDLR as a security threat to the region. Non-military measures, particularly robust support for defections and voluntary disarmament and repatriation to Rwanda of the FDLR's rank-and-file forces, are vital.

Having provided the diplomatic muscle and military assistance that made these operations possible, the United States has a responsibility to ensure that their outcomes provide for movement toward peace in the Great Lakes region. As with Sudan, the United States must align all of the tools and capabilities at its disposal in the Great Lakes region in support of an integrated strategy to end the threat to civilians posed by these deadly militias, and to extend the writ of the Congolese state to the currently lawless East. Priorities should include:

**Funding for Special Envoy for the Great Lakes and team.** Naming as soon as possible a Special Envoy for the Great Lakes to deal multilaterally with these overlapping issues would be catalytic. The envoy needs a team to work on these issues full time across borders, supported by appropriate carrots and sticks, consulting the wide array of armed groups, political parties, and civic organizations within Congo.

**Funding for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programs.** Increasing numbers of FDLR and LRA rank-and-file are seeking to come out of the bush, but the numbers remain relatively low. Increased livelihoods packages for defectors and fully funded DDR programs can incentivize defection. U.S. funding should emphasize the reintegration component of this process, which is often under-funded compared to disarmament and demobilization.

**Security Sector Reform.** Supporting the professionalization of the army and police is crucial. Human rights training is particularly necessary, along with military justice to prevent abuses.

**Basic Infrastructure for Eastern Congo.** Roads are a critical prerequisite to improved security and economic opportunities in the east.

**Funding to address conflict minerals and create legitimate economic opportunities for eastern Congo.** Capabilities to verify and monitor efforts to staunch the trade in conflict minerals, as well as processes to engender a legitimate mining sector in the east, as well as alternative livelihoods.

*Conclusion*

The opportunities to finally resolve the festering crises in Sudan and the Great Lakes Region exist now, but could disappear at a moments notice unless the United States seizes this moment. Expectations for President Obama remain high throughout Africa, providing more space than usual to help take the lead in forging a global commitment to end these crises rather than to continue managing their symptoms.

Africa's remaining wars require outside-the-box thinking in this new era of diminishing resources. The cheapest and most effective instrument we have is vast American experience in peacemaking. The cost-effectiveness of ending wars rather than continuing to manage their symptoms is undeniable. It requires a decision by the incoming president that containing the damage from the status quo is an untenable goal, which must be replaced by a full-scale multilateral effort to resolve Africa's multiple, interlocking wars. The costs of reassigning diplomats to these war zones (real transformational diplomacy) and appointing a handful of senior officials and envoys where appropriate are relatively negligible when compared with the billions we will continue to spend on clean-up, conflict containment, and counterterrorism in the context of the present "conflict management" approach.

The administration's proposed budget would include \$51.7 billion in international affairs funding for FY 2010. Specifically, President Obama's international affairs budget aims to increase America's commitment to strengthening diplomatic and assistance tools to address current and future challenges that affect our nation's security. It also further supports United Nations peacekeeping activities and seeks to eventually double U.S. foreign assistance meant to reduce poverty, help countries govern peacefully, and expand democracy worldwide.

There is a 9.5% increase in foreign assistance in current legislation, and such an early push for increased funding is commendable. Given its history and unique position, the United States has an obligation to push for peace in East and Central Africa. Achieving peace requires a comprehensive strategy, robust diplomatic engagement, and strong and capable peacekeeping forces. It also requires the world's sustained attention. Intermittent and inconsistent crisis management must be replaced by a broader effort to deal with the root causes of the conflict.

Chairwoman Lowey and members of the Committee, thank you very much, I appreciate the opportunity to testify.