



November 2012

Affinity Group on the Democratic Republic of Congo Concept Note November 2012

Context and Rationale

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) held its second democratic presidential and legislative elections on 28 November 2011, completing a contentious electoral process, including a constitutional amendment eliminating the second round of elections, and a broad crackdown by the government on members of the political opposition. Ultimately, the elections themselves were marred by widespread irregularities and some violent incidents in certain areas throughout the country. The official results published by the *Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante* (CENI), which gave incumbent President Joseph Kabila forty-nine percent of the vote, were described by international observers as “lacking credibility.” Nevertheless, the Constitutional Court endorsed the official results and declared President Kabila the victor on 20 December 2011, amidst domestic and international calls for an independent review of the electoral results.

Some regional support and the fragmented nature of the Congolese opposition, coupled with the lack of persistent, coordinated engagement from the international community has allowed the *Alliance pour la majorité présidentielle* (AMP) to weather the immediate unrest and crisis of legitimacy following the elections. However, the security situation in the country has deteriorated dramatically since the November 2011 elections. In April 2012, elements of the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC) in the Kivu provinces, consisting mostly of former members of the *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple* (CNDP), mutinied from the national army, naming themselves the March 23 (M23) movement. The subsequent conflict between the national army and the M23 troops has further destabilized the war-torn region, while the UN Group of Experts on the Congo has documented evidence of Rwandan and some Ugandan support for the rebels, highlighting a serious setback in the earlier rapprochement between the DRC and Rwanda. Amidst calls for a regional force to put an end to the activities of armed groups in the DRC, on 20 November, M23 forces occupied the city of Goma.

While the political crisis caused by the November 2011 elections and the April and November 2012 outbreaks of violence in the east both demand immediate responses from the international community, they are only the most recent manifestation of longstanding challenges in the DRC and the region, including a mix of conflict drivers unresolved since the end of the Second Congo War. International donors are suffering from a severe case of “Congo fatigue” and while frustrated at the slow pace of political reform, continue to finance programs in the face of recurrent setbacks to stability and development in the country rather than risk a total breakdown. The UN Security Council has struggled to map out the ultimate exit of the UN Stabilization Mission in the Congo, and in January will count

Rwanda as one of its members for the next two years. In the absence of new ideas for a strategic framework (and its successful implementation) that can break the cycles of violence and political unrest, the international community falls back on old responses that have often proven unsustainable. Advocacy campaigns continue to be challenged by similar limitations in new thinking. Amidst these recurrent crises, there is a need for concentrated and fresh thinking on the root causes of the conflict in the DRC and for recommendations on how best to address these long-term challenges, to help inform international engagement in the region.

Purpose

The Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum (CPPF), a program of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), has convened an ad hoc Affinity Group on the Democratic Republic of the Congo for an initial period of one year, from 1 November 2012 to 31 October 2013. This Affinity Group, originally convened by CPPF in February 2012 as part of its mandate to help inform and support the decision-making process at the United Nations, consists of a small, core group of leading scholars and researchers working on the DRC, who are deeply familiar with the context of the current challenges facing the country and who can provide long-term analysis and recommendations to help inform international engagement. Other participants, including specialists and practitioners, will be invited to participate in specific meetings depending on the objectives or agenda to be discussed. All participants will participate in their personal capacities.

This “brain trust” on the DRC will provide analysis of long-term challenges and immediate crises facing the DRC that situates these challenges in a long-term view of the political, social, and security trends in the country and the region, through a series of meetings and electronic interactions throughout the year. Where necessary, the Affinity Group will identify gaps in existing evidence or knowledge and commission research or policy papers to fill the knowledge gaps identified by its analysis. Commissioned research and policy papers will ensure a continuity of activity in-between meetings and will help inform subsequent discussions of the Group. These papers, along with summary notes from the Group’s meetings, will be made available to policymakers at the UN and in various capitals, as well as to the NGO community and other multilaterals. In addition, members of the Group will continue to interact virtually in-between meetings to share information and analysis.

There is some precedent to this type of brain trust on pressing yet long-term conflicts of international concern: The landmark Ford Foundation Study Group on South Africa in the 1980s, and the short-lived UN Secretary-General’s Resource Group on the DRC established in 1998, at the start of the Second Congo War. The Affinity Group will draw lessons from both of these examples.

Objectives

The Affinity Group on the DRC will seek to keep its analysis firmly distinct from advocacy efforts, yet will remain flexible to respond to and help inform policy processes. Members of the Affinity Group will remain in regular dialogue with policymakers so that policy needs can be fed back into the Group for consideration. Key to the success of the Group--as with all CPPF programmatic work--is this regular interaction with policymakers working on the

same issues. Where possible or deemed useful, policymakers from the United Nations and governments may be invited to participate in parts of Affinity Group discussions.

The proposed activities of the Affinity Group on the DRC will seek to accomplish several goals:

- Provide shared analysis of the immediate crises facing the DRC, including the M23 rebellion in the east, the political crisis following the 2011 elections, and regional threats to stability, with a focus on their root causes;
- Identify and address the knowledge gaps facing researchers and practitioners, and lessons learned, particularly with respect to sustainable regional and political frameworks and solutions to end the cycle of violence in DRC,
- Consider the challenges facing the long-term democratization process of the DRC and explore ideas to re-energize the process.

Format

The meetings of the Affinity Group will be held in closed-door, off-the-record settings, designed to promote full and frank discussion of the themes identified above and, where possible, identify frameworks and recommendations capable of implementation. Meetings would be convened and facilitated by the SSRC, which would also develop meeting agendas and discussion questions in consultation with members of the Affinity Group, coordinate all logistical aspects of organizing the meetings, and meet the costs of participation (including travel, accommodations, and any commissioned papers). Short summary notes, for circulation to participants and for use in linking the Group's recommendations to policy processes, would be prepared by SSRC following the meetings. Depending on lead time and need, concise and focused policy papers might be commissioned from some members in advance or following the meetings.

The Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum at the SSRC

The comparative advantage of the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum (CPPF) in convening the Affinity Group on the DRC stems from its immediate access to senior UN decision-makers, first-hand experience with UN policy and operational planning, combined with an extensive network of experts and scholars who complement its own staff's expertise on the region.

CPPF was founded in 2000 as a program of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and works to strengthen the knowledge base and analytic capacity of the United Nations system. A product of the 2000 Brahimi Panel Report on Peacekeeping, CPPF helps the United Nations strengthen its understanding of conflicts: their causes, dynamics and possible solutions. It supports UN policymaking and operations by providing UN decision-makers rapid and unfettered access to leading scholars, experts, and practitioners outside the UN system through informal consultations, off the record briefings, and commissioned research.

CPPF also helps create greater coherence within the UN system and between the UN and key partners in conflict and peacebuilding situations. In the twelve years since its founding, CPPF has become a trusted partner of senior UN officials in the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Political Affairs and of those in peace operations and UN Country Teams in the field. The core areas of engagement of CPPF's Africa program include the DRC/Central Africa, the Sudans and the Horn of Africa, West Africa and the Sahel. CPPF also works extensively on the Middle East and North Africa, Haiti, the Andes, and the Caucasus/Southern Europe.

About the Social Science Research Council (SSRC)

The Social Science Research Council, CPPF's parent institution, was founded in 1923 with a mandate to reach across disciplinary and institution boundaries and bring the best social researchers together to address problems of public concern. It has also provided over 10,000 fellowships to graduate students and young researchers around the world. The Council's distinctive niche is to innovate and incubate, to identify emergent lines of research of critical social importance that will be enhanced by interdisciplinary or international ties, and to help scattered researchers build networks and nascent fields to achieve critical mass.

Project Organization

The Affinity Group will be supported and coordinated by a small secretariat at the SSRC, and out of the Council's Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum. CPPF is overseen by an Advisory Board that exercises overall responsibility for program and policy guidance, and program evaluation. Fiduciary responsibility and oversight authority rests with the Board of Directors of the SSRC as CPPF's parent institution.

The Affinity Group secretariat will serve two principal functions, in addition to coordinating the logistics of Group meetings: First, it will facilitate internal communication and interaction among DRC researchers, and the sharing of critical analyses on the region. This may be based on web resources that the secretariat will develop as a way to store and make accessible key documentation shared by the Group. And second, build a knowledge-base specifically on DRC and make it available to policy-makers and practitioners.

Affinity Group Members (as of November 2012)

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