

DRC: LOST CHILDHOODS

THE CONTINUING CONFLICT IN THE KIVU PROVINCES



1 SUMMARY

One evening there was a lot of gunfire and we ran away. Gunshots and bombs went off and my mother fell down in front of me. A bullet had gone into her chest. She took my hand still lying on the ground and told me to run. We had to leave my mother there; they told me she was dead. When I think of her I cry, I hurt.¹

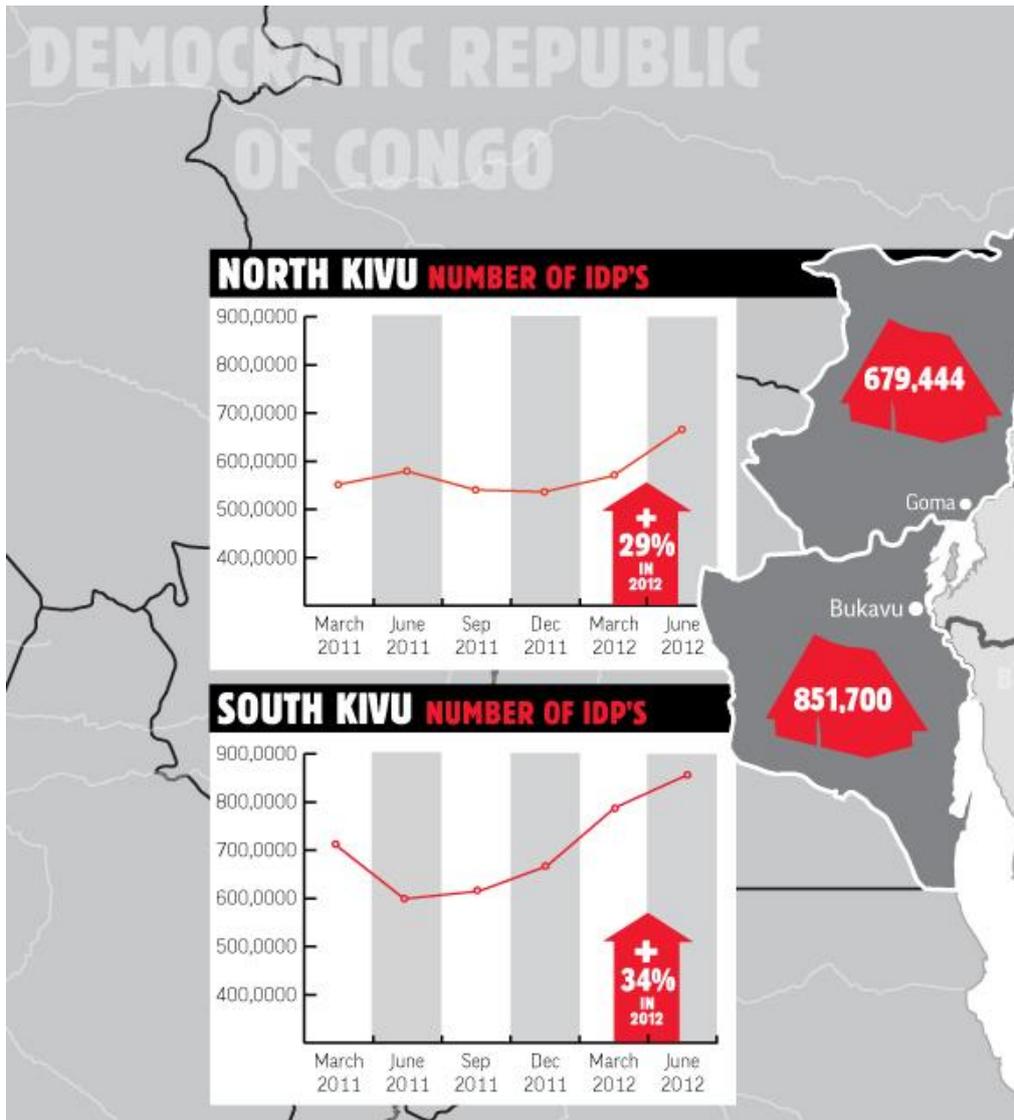
The conflict across the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has dramatically deteriorated in the past few weeks. There are now more than two dozen armed groups active in the North and South Kivu provinces, and they are deliberately targeting civilians for revenge killings, mass rape, massacres of entire villages, child recruitment and other grave human rights violations.²

Fresh clashes between fighters with the rebel 23 March Movement (M23) and the Congolese National Army have forced thousands of already displaced men, women and children to flee once again, thus exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation.³ 60,000 civilians have fled the provincial capital of Goma between 17 and 20 November, adding to what the United Nations describes as 'monumental humanitarian needs' in the troubled provinces. As the threat of a regional war grows, the United Nations Security Council has condemned the violence and called on all parties to exercise restraint.⁴

As of 20 November, an estimated 1.6 million people in the eastern part of this vast country are internally displaced —the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the DRC since the end of 2009. More than 1.5 million people reside in IDP camps in the North and South Kivu provinces. At the Kanyaruchinya IDP camp, located about 10 kilometres north of Goma, UNICEF expressed concern regarding the mental distress and health risks that children are facing, including a high chance of a cholera outbreak.⁵

At least 50 per cent of the displaced are under 18 years of age.⁶

In this report we call for the protection of all children in the Kivu regions of the DRC. The multitude of fighting groups – rebels as well as government troops – should adhere to the international standards for the protection of children in armed conflict. The international community, especially the UN peacekeeping force MONUSCO, should play a pivotal role, and secure the protection of the Congolese population, with children amongst the most vulnerable.



Source: UNICEF, Humanitarian Action Update, (August 2012)⁷.

Following the outburst of violence in the Kivu provinces, the number of IDPs increased dramatically in the first half of 2012 (see infographic). Between July and September this year 285,000 people were newly displaced.⁸ The North and South Kivu provinces combined now host over 1.6 million IDPs, representing 67 per cent of the total number of IDPs in the DRC, which stands at 2.6 million people.⁹

CHILDREN PAY A HEAVY TOLL

Children always suffer disproportionately in an armed conflict, but the current situation in the DRC is particularly acute. A new crisis is compounding an already serious conflict in which children have been paying a heavy toll. They face grave dangers from violence, hunger and disease:

- Since 1998, an estimated 5.4 million people have been killed, due to the conflict and the subsequent humanitarian crisis¹⁰, which renders the DRC conflict the deadliest since World War II. About 2.7 million children lost their lives.¹¹
- One-third of reported incidents of rape in the DRC involve children, 13% of which are children under the age of 10.¹²
- One million children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition.¹³
- 72% of children under five did not have their births registered,¹⁴ which will prevent them from accessing social or medical services in the aftermath of conflict, trauma or disease.
- 92% of children between 2 and 14 years old experience violent discipline.¹⁵

And now, this already horrific situation is significantly and rapidly worsening. All of the United Nations' six grave violations against children in conflict are taking place:

1. **Killing and maiming** – The United Nations has reported that 264 civilians, including 83 children, were summarily executed by armed groups between April and September 2012. These killings took place during more than 75 separate attacks on villages in North Kivu.¹⁶
2. **Recruitment or use as child soldiers:** Children are becoming separated from their families in the midst of the growing conflict, and unaccompanied children are highly vulnerable for recruitment. World Vision estimates that there are 200,000 children under the age of 18 in Goma now at risk of being forcibly recruited into armed groups.¹⁷ Since the beginning of 2012, 147 cases of child recruitment and use were recorded under the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, with many more going unreported.¹⁸
3. **Sexual violence and rape:** As the conflict escalates, the number of cases of sexual assault and rape has dramatically risen. In South Kivu alone, an estimated 40 young girls and women are raped on average, every day, with many as young as ten years old.¹⁹
4. **Attacks on schools and hospitals:** In the past few weeks, rebels reportedly seized seven towns in the North Kivu province, and intensified attacks on schools, hospitals, and other civilian targets. Last year the number of attacks against schools and health centres increased dramatically on the 2011 figures, with 53 incidents taking place in the Kivus and Orientale province. Schools were looted, damaged and used for military activities.²⁰

5. **Denial of humanitarian access:** The current situation represents a highly dangerous time for humanitarian workers in the region, which has the effect of restricting access to those children in dire need of aid. Five humanitarian workers were killed during an attack by an armed group in South Kivu in October last year.²¹ Cases of kidnappings of humanitarian workers were also reported in the last few weeks. Goma, Masisi and Rutshuru territories in North Kivu and Bukavu, and Uvira territory in South Kivu, were the most affected.²² In the past few days, the emergency relocation of NGOs to Rwanda has put at risk thousands of people who were relying on their humanitarian programs.²³
6. **Abduction:** 135 women and girls were allegedly abducted and sexually abused in the last few months by different armed groups.²⁴ Since the beginning of 2012, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism of the Security Council Resolution 1612/2005 recorded 35 abducted children.²⁵

The basic rights of children to survival, development and protection are therefore at serious risk in this region.

Despite children's incredible resilience and strength, the most marginalised children and young people are exposed to a multitude of problems in the midst of such conflicts, and face huge barriers in overcoming these. At an individual level, they may become fearful, withdrawn, angry, insecure, and without hope for a better future. At the societal level, their experiences often lead to stigmatisation and marginalisation in families, communities, and wider society. If these children are not successfully integrated, the violence may continue into the next generation. This can cause children to become perpetrators of violence themselves, thus creating further destabilisation within their communities.

These children have the right to receive quality support in dealing with their experiences, and to build a new future based on equality. But the services and support that are needed to realise successful integration are failing: they are not fully accessible or widely available, and they lack funding, quality and longevity. Many of the most marginalised children and youth in the Kivu provinces don't have a birth certificate, which further increases the likelihood of being excluded from support and services.

War Child is therefore advocating for an immediate adherence to the rights of children in armed conflict, and for better reintegration programming for ALL children in the North and South Kivu regions. This can be achieved through:

- An immediate ceasefire between the warring factions in the provinces.
- Until that occurs, civilians must be protected by all necessary means, with MONUSCO bearing a key responsibility for this. There must be a sustained and effective cooperation amongst all child protection partners (the Congolese government, the UN, the EU and civil society).
- A revised approach towards aid in the DRC that prioritises the best interests of the child, both in the short and long term.
- Increased funding for local and international organisations specialised in reintegration projects.

2 Humanitarian support – who is doing what?

Attempts to support the victims of the deteriorating situation in the Kivu provinces are coming from a number of sources, primarily focused on prevention and the position of child soldiers. However, structures to protect children must be better implemented and structures to answer the long-term needs of all children and young people – in terms of reintegration and rehabilitation – must be established and extended.

This Chapter will outline the various actors currently playing a role in responding to the humanitarian crisis, and the ways in which they are attempting to help vulnerable children. What should be done to improve these efforts is described in Chapter 4.

UNITED NATIONS

“ The members of the Security Council express deep concern at the worsening humanitarian situation in the North Kivu province of the DRC, especially the increasing number of displaced persons and refugees, and call on the international community to provide appropriate humanitarian support ”
*United Nations Security Council, 2 August 2012.*²⁶

The current situation requires basic needs to be met at the emergency level. Children in IDP camps and in isolated villages in the east of the DRC require – and have a right to – food, shelter and protection.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is currently leading the protection response, while the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Central Emergency Relief Fund is primarily focused on improving food security and nutrition, delivering non-food items, ensuring access to basic health care and improving infrastructure.²⁷

INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL NGOs

Alongside the United Nations, NGOs and aid organisations such as Solidarités International, Save the Children, Johanniter International, Caritas, International Emergency and Development Aid (IDEA Relief) and the World Food Programme, amongst many more, are working hard to respond to the growing crisis. They are currently bringing emergency shelter and non-food items to displaced people and other vulnerable groups in 31 IDP sites, camps and areas of displacement across the North and South Kivu provinces.²⁸ Since mid-September, these organisations also worked to provide school kits for at least 3,000 vulnerable children, to assist them with the new school year, and to build new classrooms. Such attempts to reintegrate children are critical, but much more needs to be done in the provision of psychosocial care and rehabilitation programmes. The sooner children commence participation in these programmes, the easier and more successful the reintegration process will be.

MONUSCO

What is MONUSCO?

The United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the DRC – MONUSCO – has been operating in the DRC since 1999. However, despite being one of the best-equipped peacekeeping missions in the world – 17,000 peacekeepers and a budget of US\$1.3 billion a year – the various armed groups operating in the DRC, supported by an illicit mineral trade and unchecked by any domestic rule of law, have continued to perpetrate mass rapes, killings and other atrocities, heavily impacting on the situation of hundreds of thousands of civilians in the region. More than two dozen MONUSCO peacekeepers have been killed in action so far in 2012. A UN-commissioned expert report in November 2009 said that UN involvement had done little to quell the violence.²⁹

MONUSCO recently helped to negotiate an action plan to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers, which was adopted by the DRC Government on 4 October 2012. In addition to measures to stop and prevent the recruitment and use of children, the Action Plan also outlines steps to protect girls and boys from sexual violence, in accordance with Resolution 1882 of the Security Council. Given the continued violence in eastern DRC, and its limited resources given the size of the region and its poor infrastructure, MONUSCO has therefore achieved some results in respect of child protection.

However, based on the information we have received from our field offices, MONUSCO needs to do significantly more to protect civilians, especially children, particularly in the midst of the escalating security situation in Goma and the surrounding areas. This is discussed in Chapter 4.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union, through the Council of Ministers and its High Representative, has condemned the current violence in eastern DRC and has called upon all parties involved to constructively work towards a peaceful resolution, based on dialogue.³⁰

The EU is one of the most important donors in eastern DRC, and the European Commission has donated more than €300 million since 2003. These funds have been spent on humanitarian assistance, as well as rehabilitation and capacity building programmes, working closely with the United Nations. However, the EU's existing framework on children affected by armed conflict suffers greatly from its lack of visibility and its inadequate implementation, and EU delegates themselves receive little training on child protection and the rights of children and young people.

THE CONGOLESE GOVERNMENT

The Congolese government is making efforts within the ISSSS (International Stabilisation Support Strategy), yet no special attention is being given in relation to children. One of the key ways that the Congolese government is assisting children and young people is the provision of vulnerability certificates by the Division of Social Affairs to all children previously associated with armed forces and groups, which give them a tax exemption. This is especially useful when these young people start their own businesses after completing a vocational training course. Such courses are essential in allowing young people to support themselves financially and to make a contribution to the economic re-growth of their communities.

In addition, the government plays a technical supervisory role in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes funded by UNICEF, and the Ministry of Gender has integrated the UN Comprehensive Strategy on Combating Sexual Violence in DRC into its national strategy.

These are the ways in which the Congolese government is currently working to protect and support the position of children and young people, but they are not close to enough. The essential steps that need to be taken by the Congolese government are addressed in Chapter 4, including the issue of its armed forces playing an active role in the escalating conflict.

THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT

For many years, the Netherlands has allocated bilateral humanitarian aid to the DRC, and its bilateral budget for 2012 is €5.8 million. These funds are provided to humanitarian programmes of international NGOs, predominantly in the Kivu region, and partly to the UN. While this aid is critical, and attention in the aid programmes is given to women and children, no special programmes for children are currently being subsidised by the Dutch government. The rights of children are simply not a priority of the government's human rights policy.

3 Voices from the field

Kabare (17)

My name is Kabare. I am 17 year old and I am the oldest of six children in my family. We live in Ngugo village in Rugari (North Kivu). I studied up to the second year of primary school. My father died when I was 10 years old and we have been brought up by our mother.



We heard the sound of gun shots and explosions. A big noise was coming from my Aunt's house and when we all went out to see what was happening we saw her house in flames. A bomb had fallen into their house and my Aunt's husband was on fire.

We found two burnt bodies in front of the house. It was my aunt and my grandfather. They were already dead.

We did not have time to look after them or bury their bodies because there were more bullets whistling past and bombs falling. We started running, each person saving themselves without thinking of the others. The next morning I found myself in a group with other people who were going towards Goma. I looked for members of my family in vain. I do not know if they went towards Uganda or towards Kiwanja. Maybe they are all dead. I have not had any news of them.

I never want to go through what happened at Rugari ever again. Now I understand what death is. When my father died I did not know what that really meant. Now I know what it is to die.

Without a family, in a displaced people's camp with no food, I will go with the first person to offer me a family life. I am not really old enough to get married. But really I do not know what to do. I have no tent, no family, nothing.

Espoir (10)

I am ten years old. My brother is five. In our family we had 7 children, all boys. My mother was pregnant but not yet ready to give birth. Each day, soldiers came into our village to beat people and steal. One day we saw lots of soldiers moving on foot. Afterwards we heard gunfire and falling bombs. There were lots of bullets and we could not move. My brother was not with us. Nobody could go and find him. When the gunfire died down my father went to find him. He was clinging to the monument at Rumangabo (North Kivu) and could not move. He told us *"the bullets were passing over my head and I was very scared. I could not walk, I could not move"*.

We came to the camp with my father and my three younger brothers. After several days my mother came and found us in the camp. She was with our other smaller brother but she was no longer pregnant. She had a wound on her chin. She told us that a bullet hit her chin and she fell. And when she fell she lost the baby. She told me that she had seen the bodies of my two older brothers along the road. She could not stop for them. But she knew that they were already dead.

My big brother had been sent into the bush. The soldiers told him to carry weapons for them. I do not know if he is still alive. He has not come back.

Two days after my mother arrived I noticed that father, mother and three of my little brothers had disappeared. We were left on our own, Réponse and me. Since that day I have not seen them.

We sleep outside. Kind people give us some food to eat. When I think of the war I feel bad in the stomach and my heart beats very fast. I am scared.

Frederick Monpeyssen, DRC Country Director, War Child Holland

Everyday I check the news and read about murders, the burning of homes, women and men being raped, children being kidnapped to carry goods. Half the time it is the rebel groups, half the time it is the authorities. Both operate in complete immunity. The rebel groups get support from other countries. The DRC army cannot control its own troops, who don't receive pay or proper training.

The government has been encouraged to pay its soldiers by bank transfer. In doing so, the government discovered it was paying thousands of people who didn't even exist. Those who aren't paid have no other means to survive that to commit crimes. This puts children at risk. They are vulnerable, they can be kidnapped or taken by force, and turned into sex slaves or soldiers.

War Child works to identify children, to put them back in schools or into recovery places. We also work to provide them with vocational training such as woodwork, metalwork, sewing, mechanic, knitting or hairdressing. They are then followed up for two years. This works very well and has a high success rate. The children say "I've changed", and by learning a trade they have something to look forward to in life.

4 From marginalisation to participation: a call to action

First of all, all relevant actors must work together to ensure that emphasis is placed on the protection of children and young people during the armed conflict. Second, they must ensure that children receive reintegration support after the conflict.

Article 38 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child:

Governments must do everything they can to **protect and care for children affected by war**. Children under 15 should **not be forced or recruited to take part in a war** or join the armed forces. The Convention's Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict further develops this right, raising the age for direct participation in armed conflict to **18** and establishing a ban on compulsory recruitment for children under 18.

Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote **physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration** of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the **health, self-respect and dignity** of the child.

Such support is needed for all children, not just former child combatants. The particular situation facing girls, orphans, children out of school and children with disabilities must be taken into account. It is also important to take into account how armed conflict differently impacts girls and boys when formulating assessments and making concrete plans.³¹

While the best outcome would be the creation of a lasting and sustained peace in the entirety of the DRC, until that happens there are a number of key ways in which the position of children and young people in the Kivus can be improved.

All parties to the conflict must adhere to the long established principles of international humanitarian law and immediately refrain from targeting civilians, especially children. They must cease all violations of human rights and children's rights. They must respect MONUSCO's mandate to protect civilians. And they must enter into ceasefire negotiations.

Based on our experience in the field, as well as feedback received from Congolese children themselves, we call to the following target groups to take action:

UNITED NATIONS

The current situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo starkly illustrates how children are repeatedly the demographic that suffers most during conflicts. The United Nations and its Member States need to strengthen the existing protection measures for children in armed conflict, to ensure that the basic and emergency needs of children are met during humanitarian crises.

“ We must not forget the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They are in the midst of one of the most complex humanitarian crises in the world and deserve our continued support. ”

Valerie Amos, United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, 7 August 2012

However, the UN must also do all that it can to assist in the critical process of rehabilitating and reintegrating children. It must continue to work with its partners in helping children return to schools, and to undergo reintegration via psychosocial help sessions, as well as providing support with education and vocational training. The new UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflicts, Leila Zerrougui, must continue the work of her predecessors in lobbying for support for such programmes. The UNHCR must also work quickly to identify the many unaccompanied children at the IDP camps. Their speedy identification will greatly assist with reuniting them with their families, and getting a quick start on efforts to help them reintegrate back into their communities.

MONUSCO

It is the mandate of MONUSCO to ‘ensure the effective protection of civilians’ and ‘to promote and protect human rights and to fight impunity’.³² However, there are many areas in the DRC within mere kilometres of the MONUSCO bases that are the subject of attacks, such as Bunyakiri in South Kivu, yet MONUSCO is unable to provide adequate security patrols, and only reports on the attacks. There are zero patrols in the Nzibira and Chulwe areas, where they are greatly needed. The immediate situation in Goma further underlines this problem. The vast numbers of civilians fleeing the area raises the critical question of how effectively the mandate of MONUSCO to protect civilians is being implemented. There needs to be an assessment of how the Mission’s resources, and command and control structures, can be modified to give better effect to the ultimate objective of civilian protection, especially in relation to children.

In addition, War Child supports the call from the International Crisis Group, in its 20 November report, for MONUSCO’s leadership to immediately commence attempts to negotiate and secure a formal ceasefire.³³

In relation to children, MONUSCO must work harder to protect children and to negotiate the release or disarmament of children being used by rebel groups and armed forces, and in providing safe transport of such children into the care of their NGO partners, to participate in essential reintegration and rehabilitation programmes.

It is essential that MONUSCO collaborates and works together with the Congolese government and civil society to find compromises that give effect to the best interests of Congolese children and young people.

CONGOLESE GOVERNMENT

The Congolese government recently signed – together with the United Nations – an Action Plan to prevent both the recruitment of children and the committing of acts of sexual violence by the Congolese army, but action on the ground is needed. The armed forces must decline the voluntary recruitment of any person who cannot provide documented evidence that they are older than eighteen years of age. Great strides have been made by the Congolese authorities on the issue of child recruitment in the past ten years and such efforts must be commended, and continued. These can take the form of increased awareness-raising on the part of the armed forces on the prohibition of under-age recruitment and of sexual violence, as well as the imposition of legal consequences for perpetrators.

The government can protect children by increasing efforts to provide birth certificates and to improve its system of birth registrations. This issue was highlighted in the recent recommendations by the UNHRC and the Child Rights Committee on how the government can meet its obligations under the Optional Protocol on children in armed conflict – and must therefore be high on the Congolese government's agenda.

The Congolese government has an obligation to protect children from grave violations committed by third parties, such as the numerous armed groups operating in the Kivu regions. This obligation stems from the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which the Congolese government ratified in 2001. In addition, the government has a responsibility to ensure that children who were associated with armed groups as regarded as victims, and are not unlawfully detained or unfairly prosecuted. One step in this process is to allow MONUSCO's child protection personnel unimpeded access to military facilities, prisons and interrogation centres.

There are also recent reports that the Congolese government is continuing to face numerous difficulties in exerting sufficient control over members of its armed forces. All members of the armed forces should undergo a comprehensive and screening mechanism covering their human rights record, and receive a uniform identifying their name and rank, as recommended by the UN in 2010.³⁴ All members of the armed forces must also receive their salary, as this actively discourages personnel from engaging in illicit activities towards civilians, particularly vulnerable children. It is also the

responsibility of the Congolese armed forces to take responsibility for the wives and children of fallen soldiers, and to additionally refrain from neglecting to provide compensation and support to those young former combatants now over the age of eighteen. It is additionally essential that members of the Congolese armed forces receive systematic training on child protection, and that there is an effective mechanism to hold accountable those who commit crimes against children.

EUROPEAN UNION

The promotion and protection of the rights of the child is a priority of the EU's human rights policy, yet this is not always visible. The DRC should continue to benefit from funding under the Commission budget lines, in particular from its European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO). However, the European Commission must make funds available specifically for programmes that address the rehabilitation and reintegration needs of children in the troubled Kivu regions. Such programmes give effect to the European Union Guidelines on Children in Armed Conflict, in which the EU undertakes not only to provide emergency aid to children in conflict, but to additionally provide for their long-term needs, in an 'effective and comprehensive manner'.

These Guidelines were created in 2003 and revised in 2008, and they are strengthened by the addition of a comprehensive strategy for implementation, first conceived in 2006 and revised in 2010.³⁵ Together these documents represent an authoritative and substantial framework for the treatment of children affected by armed conflict, yet suffer from poor visibility and lack of application. The EU can build upon this existing basis to improve and strengthen its efforts and actions relating to children in conflict. The EU delegates in Kinshasa must continue to engage in political dialogue with the Congolese government to encourage multilateral co-operation on initiatives that promote children's rights.

More generally, War Child also calls upon the EU to increase the visibility and implementation of these Guidelines around the world, and to continue to find new ways to cooperate with the UN and international and local NGOs on this critical issue.

DONORS

Donors and agencies must act quickly to assist with funding requirements, for both short-term humanitarian aid and long-term rehabilitation and reintegration efforts, and support programmes that assist in the provision of economic opportunities for children and young people. Donors can also greatly assist the work of humanitarian organisations by making their assistance and funding conditional upon a real commitment from the DRC government – at both provincial and national levels – to use the support for child rehabilitation and reintegration. This can take the form of child protection strategies, psychosocial support programmes, and the provision of education and training.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES

An essential role is also played by community-based child protection systems that work to ensure that vulnerable children are safe from recruitment and other dangers during conflicts. In addition, a region emerging from conflict needs its young people to be actively engaged and motivated to help with rebuilding and re-growth. Local communities must support their young people, welcoming them back into their communities and helping them to receive an education and training. They are valued members of a community who must be encouraged and supported. Any programmes initiated and carried out by international actors – including NGOs - must ensure the active participation of local communities – including children and young people themselves – at all stages.³⁶

DUTCH GOVERNMENT

In the Netherlands, the current policy of humanitarian aid must aim to protect basic human rights, as well as increasing security and prosperity. These aims must reflect the fact that 30-50% of the victims of war are children. These children represent the future of a post-conflict country, and ensuring their safety and providing them with a future can greatly assist the economic recovery process. By funding reintegration programmes and assisting with education and training, the Netherlands has the opportunity to help the DRC to produce active and engaged citizens who are the key to long-term development and the breaking of the cycle of violence. In order to do so, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must pursue a foreign policy agenda that specifically prioritises the best interests of the child, and the Dutch government should use its influence with its partners to encourage collaboration to fund rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. The Dutch government has, as mentioned above, been a consistent contributor to the Congolese government, but it must take steps to ensure that its support is directed towards protecting the rights and needs of children and young people. It can do this by supporting programmes that work to successfully integrate children back into their communities and provide access to safe and equal opportunities.

In addition, the Dutch government can also make valuable contributions to the lives of children and young people affected by armed conflict by revising its policy relating to unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in the Netherlands, including those from the DRC. There is too little clarity as to how the best interests of the child are considered in the procedure of returning minors to their home countries, and this must be addressed by the incoming administration.³⁷

ANNEX

What is War Child doing in DR Congo?

War Child Holland, War Child UK and War Child Canada implement projects in DR Congo. They are part of the War Child International family of independent humanitarian organisations which work together to help Children and Young People (CYP) affected by armed conflict. The organisations have similar programming and missions, but work in different areas of the country. However, the projects complement each other and have the overall aim of strengthening child protection and psychosocial support to Congolese children and young people.



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War Child Holland started its activities in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in 2003, and is presently active in the Bukavu, Walungu and Mwenga territories of the South Kivu province, in the fields of education, child protection, psychosocial support and community reintegration. War Child's specific experience in the use of creative means and sports for psychosocial purposes is highly valued and contributes to enabling children to grow into balanced adults capable of meaningful participation in their family, community and society.

This is also due to its integrated child centred approach, which includes all children and young people affected by war, their parents and care-givers, the wider community and local and national decision makers. In all of its programmes, War Child Holland works closely with local partners in the development, implementation and monitoring of activities.

War Child UK is running projects at either end of the vast country. In the capital Kinshasa (in the west of the country) the organisation is supporting vulnerable street children. In Goma and North Kivu War Child UK is on the ground in some of the worst affected areas, supporting separated and unaccompanied children with life skills training, literacy, health care, education, socio-economic incentives, psychosocial support, art therapy, as well as family mediation/reintegration.

War Child Holland and War Child UK recently started up a shared project in North Kivu aimed at establishing and improving community based prevention, protection and support mechanisms for vulnerable children. Activities include:

- Training and supporting local organisations dealing with children and youth who survived sexual gender based violence, conflict and exploitation (sexual and forced labour);
- Rehabilitation, supporting and equipping the youth led management of child protection hubs, where children can access support and information and participate in life skills programmes to enable them to better protect themselves.

War Child Canada focuses on education. War Child's programme of school rehabilitation is giving Congo's children the opportunity of a more normal childhood. To date, War Child has rebuilt 38 schools, giving 12,400 children access to a decent education. The program goes far beyond bricks and mortar, offering a holistic approach to schooling. Many teachers were among the millions killed in the conflict. Those that survived have been out of the classroom for years. War Child has trained or re-trained 344 teachers from over 36 schools in child-centred learning. All the schools we have worked with have been re-equipped, meaning teachers and pupils no longer have to share books, pencils, chalk and other essentials. In addition to the schools, War Child provides after-school numeracy and literacy classes to over 2,500 out of school children. We have also partnered with two local community radio stations to broadcast children's radio shows, and to provide ongoing training for children and young people, so that they can become involved with the programming, youth journalism and community outreach, on issues such as HIV/AIDS, peace building and sexual and gender based violence

¹ Story shared with War Child by 10 years old Francine, living in a spontaneous camp in Goma, August 16th, 2012

² For a detailed account of the various armed groups involved in the current conflict in the North and South Kivu regions, please see 'Report on children and Armed Conflict of the Secretary-General to the Security Council' A/66/782-S/2012/261 (28 April 2012) and UNICEF Humanitarian Action Update (4 August 2012), available at:

http://www.unicef.org/hac2012/files/UNICEF_DRC_Humanitarian_Action_Update_2012.pdf

³ 'New fighting in eastern DR Congo adds to already dire humanitarian situation', UN News Centre (19 November 2012). Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/news/>

⁴ Security Council Press Statement on Situation in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (17 November 2012). Available at: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2012/sc10819.doc.htm>

⁵ 'UNICEF calls for the protection of children in Eastern DR Congo' (19 November 2012). Available at: http://www.unicef.org/media/media_66395.html There are already 60 cases of cholera being reported per day: UN OCHA, 'Democratic Republic of Congo, North Kivu, Situation Report No. 8' (19 November 2012), available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/north-kivu-situation-report-no-8-19-november-2012>

⁶ UNICEF Humanitarian action update, august 2012:

http://www.unicef.org/hac2012/files/UNICEF_DRC_Humanitarian_Action_Update_2012.pdf

⁷ UNICEF Humanitarian action update, august 2012:

http://www.unicef.org/hac2012/files/UNICEF_DRC_Humanitarian_Action_Update_2012.pdf

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²² Ibid

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