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The project to end genocide and crimes against humanity



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Contact: Paula Newbaker; pnewbaker@enoughproject.org
202-481-8215

Joann Donnellan: joann@jdmediapr.com
703-966-1990

Averting Renewed Regional War in Eastern Congo Statement by the Enough Project

The offensive by the rebel Laurent Nkunda's National Congress for the Defense of People, or CNDP, has dramatically worsened the crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. This latest fighting threatens to once again draw Congo's neighbors directly into the fray in a damaging escalation that would effectively undo a six-year regional and international effort to stabilize the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region.

The immediate crisis should not distract the world from a larger truth: peace in the Congo – and indeed the Great Lakes – requires a comprehensive strategy, robust diplomatic engagement, and a strong and capable peacekeeping force. It also requires the world's sustained attention. Intermittent and inconsistent crisis management must be replaced by a broader effort to deal with the drivers of endemic insecurity and atrocities.

The January Goma agreement – which secured a ceasefire between the Congolese government and 22 armed groups – is effectively dead. The CNDP has taken control of a critical strategic corridor, stretching from Kibumba to Rutshuru, and has done so without facing effective military resistance or a real cost for its actions. Tens of thousands of people have been displaced in the last several days, including many who were living in camps that were overrun by Nkunda's fighters. This brings the total number of displaced, since the latest round of fighting began in late August, to more than 200,000. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are now cut off from access to humanitarian assistance and many relief agencies are evacuating staff, virtually assuring that the mortality rates in eastern Congo will rise to even more grotesque heights.

Incapable of slowing the CNDP's advance toward Goma, poorly disciplined Congolese government forces have fallen into disorder and now threaten the civilians they are

obligated to protect, reportedly with rape and looting. Hindered by insufficient resources to stabilize the region, the UN peacekeeping force – MONUC – has been used as a foil by both sides, and anti-UN sentiments are on the rise. Vulnerable Congolese civilians lack protection, and Congolese human rights defenders are at risk of reprisals for speaking out against the renewed violence.

The situation continues to change by the hour, but Nkunda's declaration of a temporary and conditional ceasefire offers a momentary window of opportunity. A senior U.N. envoy must engage the parties to develop a sustained, structured dialogue, sequencing a ceasefire, the withdrawal of forces, and political talks. Support for this process will require forceful and coordinated action by diplomats and their direct engagement with both parties.

It is also critical that the U.N. Security Council immediately take steps to bolster MONUC so that it has the political clout and military capabilities to assert itself as a protector of Congolese civilians. MONUC must be prepared to respond forcefully to aggression from any side.

The world must also help ensure an end to impunity for any war crimes and crimes against humanity. When forces loyal to Laurent Nkunda last menaced a major Congolese city, occupying Bukavu in South Kivu in 2004, they engaged in widespread rape and pillage. The fact that no one was held accountable for those crimes has undeniably contributed to behavior around Goma at present.

What the United States must do:

Working with partners in the United Nations, European Union, and African Union, the United States should take the following immediate steps to help defuse the current crisis:

1. *Speak directly to all parties in the conflict:* The Assistant Secretary of State for Africa is in the region and is well placed to support a U.N.-led dialogue between President Kabila and General Nkunda. The United States must also encourage the ongoing discussions between the Congolese and Rwandan governments. A détente between the two countries is critical for easing tensions in the short-term and dealing with root causes of conflict in the long term.
2. *Urge all armed groups and regional governments to avoid cross-border adventurism:* The United Nations Security Council should be prepared to enact targeted sanctions against any party that crosses national borders to engage in hostilities.
3. *Support MONUC's efforts to fulfill its mandate and protect civilians at risk from violence.* The U.S. should use all available resources to support the redeployment of MONUC forces to Goma, and support multilateral efforts to give MONUC the capabilities required for it to "take robust action to protect citizens at risk and deter any attempt to threaten political process by any armed group," as called for by the U.N. Security Council. The European Union, or EU, is best placed to lead this effort, but the United States military has assets in Uganda and Djibouti that could assist an EU-led effort.

4. *Promote accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity:* All sides must be held to account for the crimes committed, and the International Criminal Court must work with MONUC to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity by all sides. The United States must also make clear to the Congolese government that the behavior of its security forces during this crisis will weigh heavily in consideration of future foreign aid and security assistance from the United States.
5. *Address the long-term problem:* Work through the Security Council to assure political and financial support for a sustained international stabilization effort in eastern Congo.

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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, Somalia, and Zimbabwe. 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.