Starting in late August 2008, violence re-ignited in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), bordering Rwanda and Uganda. Skirmishes continued until 24 October, when rebel forces loyal to Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP) leader Laurent Nkunda began a major offensive. Heavy fighting resumed in Rutshuru territory, and CNDP forces advanced on Goma -- the capital of North Kivu province. The CNDP forces quickly and easily overwhelmed the Government forces (FARDC). The UN Mission in the DRC (MONUC) is mandated to support the government forces. However, poor command, control and support for troops within the FARDC resulted in the collapse of a number of FARDC units, leaving MONUC as the sole organized force to defend the population in many parts of North Kivu, including in Goma. Fighting near the DRC-Rwanda border heightened tensions between the two countries. On 29 October, the CNDP unilaterally declared a ceasefire, after nearly a quarter million civilians had been newly displaced since August 2008. Despite the declared ceasefire, fighting continued in North Kivu, pitting CNDP forces against the FARDC and irregular militias, particularly PARECO Mai Mai. Over 1.3 million persons are displaced and in need of humanitarian assistance.

Even before the most recent wave of fighting, in an oral report to the Security Council in early October, SRSG Doss told the Council that MONUC had deployed over 90 per cent of its troops in the eastern DRC. Despite this concentration of the Force, the population of the Kivus issues that this amounts to ten soldiers for every 10,000 residents. The SRSG requested additional resources to enable the Mission carry out its mandate. He also underscored the need for stepped-up, diplomatic and political efforts to bring about sustainable peace in the DRC.

Since the start of large-scale hostilities in late October, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has been heavily engaged in diplomatic efforts. He has held discussions with leaders in Africa, the European Union (EU) and the United States in an effort to stabilize the situation in eastern DRC. He has also dispatched Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Alain Le Roy and his deputy, Edmond Mulet, to the DRC to make firsthand assessments and see how MONUC could be strengthened. ASG for Political Affairs Haile Menkerios, who played a key role in mediating the Joint Communiqué between the DRC and Rwanda (the Nairobi Communiqué in November 2007) was also dispatched for talks with leaders in the region, including Rwanda’s President Kagame.

On 3 November, Secretary-General Ban also appointed former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo as his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region to help find a political solution to the crisis in eastern Congo. “He will work with the leaders of the region and the international community to bring about a lasting political solution,” Mr. Ban told a press stakeout. President Obasanjo has already completed his initial trip to the region where he met with Presidents Joseph Kabila of the DRC, José Eduardo dos Santos of Angola and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, as well as with CNDP leader Laurent Nkunda.

Mr. Ban has repeatedly called on all parties to respect the ceasefire in Goma. On 19 November, he welcomed the announcement on 18 November of a military pullback by the National Congress in Defense of the People (CNDP) and the opening of humanitarian corridors to allow unhindered access to people in need in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. He expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted by his Special Envoy, Olusegun Obasanjo and called on the parties to observe the cessation of hostilities and to guarantee safe passage for humanitarian assistance as they continue with efforts to find a political solution to the crisis. He also urged the international community to help the UN’s humanitarian relief efforts and has further em-
phasized that MONUC must be given the additional resources it needs to carry out its mandate in an increasingly dire security environment.

In addition, the Secretary-General recently decided to ask Lt. Gen. Babacar Gaye (Senegal) to return to DRC as Force Commander, where he had previously served from March 2005 through to October 2008, after the sudden resignation of his successor, Lt. General Vicente Diaz de Villegas (Spain), for personal reasons.

On 7 November, the Secretary-General attended the UN-backed summit of the African Union in Nairobi, Kenya concerning the situation in the DRC, along with DRC President Joseph Kabila and President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, as well as the leaders of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and South Africa. During his remarks, the Secretary-General said: "Neither the DRC, nor Rwanda, nor the rest of the Central Africa region can afford to be dragged back into conflict. The international community cannot allow this to occur."

**MONUC actions**

MONUC, under the leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the DRC, Mr. Alan Doss, has worked hard to protect civilian populations, seeking to mediate between fighting groups, supporting the FARDC and engaging the CNDP both in self defense and to prevent further rebel advances. MONUC has evacuated humanitarian personnel and wounded civilians and escorted humanitarian convoys and working with the Police Nationale Congolaise (PNC) and FARDC units, peacekeepers have helped restore a measure of security and law and order in the city of Goma. Force Commander Gaye has worked directly with the senior DRC military leadership to help reorganize FARDC units and restore command and control to more effectively defend key areas.

MONUC has reconfigured its forces throughout the East, reinforcing its presence in the city of Goma and the surrounding areas. Mobile operating bases have been established along main communications routes to the North and to the West, towards the border with South Kivu.

About 6,000 peacekeepers, more than one third of MONUC's overall strength, are now deployed in 38 different locations in North Kivu. With the exception of Goma and a few bases with more than 150 MONUC troops, between 50 and 100 Blue Helmets are deployed in small operating bases at strategic locations, providing reassurance and protection to IDPs who now number more than 1 million (of the province's 4 million population).

In Goma, peacekeepers from India, Malawi and South Africa have been bolstered by the deployment of blue helmets from Guatemala, Uruguay and Senegal, as well as a Formed Police Unit from India. MONUC's overall deployment in the city itself, which includes two teams of military observers, now stands at some 1,300. Additional combat helicopters have been positioned in the region to assist with protection efforts and additional redeployments to the East of Peacekeepers from other areas of the DRC are also under way. In addition to these units, teams of UN military observers remain deployed elsewhere in North Kivu.

**The need to strengthen MONUC**

On 20 November 2008, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1843 (2008) which authorized an additional 3,100 troops and police for MONUC to ensure that MONUC can more effectively implement its mandate including, protection of civilians and ensuring humanitarian access.

At present, MONUC has some 17,000 peacekeepers across the DRC. Under-Secretary-General Le Roy and SRSG Doss have repeatedly stated that MONUC troops are overstretched and need to be reinforced.
MONUC's military is charged with protecting civilians and supporting Government troops. Some 22 different Congolese and foreign armed groups operate in the eastern DRC and the mission is presently engaged on four fronts in the East alone.

In Orientale province, MONUC has provided logistical support to FARDC in efforts to protect civilians and contain the Ugandan rebel group known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). In Ituri, MONUC has supported FARDC in responding to renewed militia activity, some of which may represent spillover from North Kivu. In South Kivu, MONUC troops are working to stabilize the province, proceed with disengagement plans previously agreed among irregular armed groups and to maintain pressure on the FDLR, an armed group which includes remnants of the forces involved in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Redeploying additional MONUC troops to the Kivus risks weakening the MONUC Force elsewhere in the vast country.

MONUC's size is modest when compared with other peacekeeping operations deployed in smaller areas. In Kosovo in the late 1990s, 47,000 NATO-led troops deployed in an area 200 times smaller than the DRC to protect a population of under two millions. In the mid 1990s, the UN deployed 5,000 blue helmets to eastern Croatia in an area with a population of less than 125,000. Today, more than 10,000 UN troops serve in Liberia which has a population of less than 3.5 million.

MONUC has regularly adjusted its military deployment plan to maximize its efficiency and enable it to deal with specific threats to the peace during its nine-year existence. The Security Council has responded positively on several occasions to requests to strengthen MONUC's mandate and provide the mission with additional resources. In New York in recent months, MONUC and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations have recommended to the Security Council an increase in the mission's authorized strength and have specifically asked for infantry units, special forces troops, military engineers, additional air assets as well as additional formed police units and capacity for improving surveillance of armed groups.

**MONUC background**

MONUC was established on 30 November 1999 by Security Council resolution 1279, after the DRC, Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe signed the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in July 1999 for a cessation of hostilities between all belligerent forces in the DRC.

Since its establishment, MONUC evolved from its initial role as an observer mission into a more robust presence, especially since resolution 1493 (2003), which authorized the mission to use force in the protection of civilians, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

As the situation has evolved in the DRC in the past decade, so has the strength and the mandate of MONUC. MONUC's mandate has expanded to support security sector reform, including the integration of the national security forces, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants and, the training and monitoring of the police.

The mission has also been mandated to assist the Congolese authorities in organizing, preparing and conducting elections. In this regard, MONUC facilitated the first post-colonial national multi-party election in the DRC in 2006, and has been preparing to help with local elections next year, a task that poses unprecedented logistical challenges in the huge but underdeveloped country.

MONUC has also been called upon to help implement two peace agreements reached in the last year: 1) the Joint Communiqué between the DRC and Rwanda (Nairobi Communiqué) of 9 November 2007 between the DRC and Rwanda, aimed at increasing cooperation between the two countries to eliminate the threat of foreign and Congolese armed groups in the eastern DRC; and 2) the Goma Actes d'engagement (Acts of Commitment), signed on 23 January 2008 between the Government of the DRC, the CNDP and armed groups in its violence-torn eastern region. This Actes established a ceasefire and set out principles for the separation of forces and for the rebels to either disarm and demobilize, or be integrated into the national armed forces through a process known as “brassage”.


MONUC forces

As of 19 November, MONUC had a total of 18,514 uniformed personnel. This includes 16,702 troops, 722 military observers, and 1,090 police officers. There are also more than 900 international and 2,100 local staff, and approximately 550 UN Volunteers.

On 20 November 2008, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1843 (2008) which authorized an additional 3,100 troops and police for MONUC to ensure that MONUC can more effectively implement its mandate including protection of civilians and ensuring humanitarian access.

MONUC’s major troop and police contributors are India (4,388 troops, 250 police and 58 military observers); Pakistan (3,588 troops and 53 military observers); Bangladesh (1,331 troops, 248 police officers, 28 military observers); Uruguay (1,324 troops and 47 military observers); South Africa (1,158 troops, 15 military observers); and Nepal (1,031 troops and 25 military observers).

Humanitarian assistance

Clashes caused massive displacements of civilians. UN agencies are working to assist over 1 million displaced persons in the Kivus, one quarter of them displaced since August. Many of these have already fled the war several times, moving back and forth, often in circles, to avoid the armed groups and the frontline. MONUC is assisting with the relocation of some 65,000 IDPs in camps located in unsafe zones near Kibati, just north of the city of Goma, where FARDC troops and CNDP forces have been engaged in a stand-off.

Due to the intense fighting, the prevailing insecurity, as well as looting by undisciplined elements of the FARDC, humanitarian operations have been severely restricted. Relief assistance to vulnerable populations has been erratic at best, leaving many affected people without assistance. Humanitarian actors are working with all parties to the conflict to improve access.

Cholera outbreaks have been reported in several areas of the Kivus. Lack of access, weak health services and a lack of safe water and proper sanitation facilities have led to a tripling of cases in the Goma area since the start of October. The epidemic is in progression, despite the intensification of the response by UN agencies and their partners.

The UN is seeking $86 million in donor assistance to cover the priority needs and respond specifically to the recent humanitarian crises in North Kivu, Ituri District and Dungu. As of 20 November donors have provided $53 million.

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For additional information, please visit: www.monuc.org