

Peacekeeping forces fail to protect Congolese

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UN mandate in DRC expires: 30 June



An item from the [Agenda](#) section of the magazine, in which we flag important upcoming global events for our readers



Antony Njuguna / Reuters

Another year's renewal of the mission is expected. However, despite this being the world's largest peacekeeping force (some 18,500-strong), the first quarter of this year has seen a spike in LRA violence.

People across large swathes of eastern DRC live in constant fear of violent attack. Decades of war have shattered poor communities, who are forced to live without justice, security or access to basic services such as water and sanitation.

Between January and March, more than 100 LRA attacks were reported in the region, over a third more than during the whole of 2010. Across the whole of the east, where instability continues to cause huge suffering, more than 1.7 million people remain displaced.

Abau Adua has been homeless since the LRA descended on his village a year ago. 'We were out on the river when the LRA attacked,' he explains. 'We heard the screams and the shouting. I saw 16 corpses, people beaten and stabbed to death. Two of my close family – my cousin and my nephew – were among them.'

'Communities continue to live under daily threat of attack,' says Marcel Stoessel, head of Oxfam in DRC. 'The UN's primary role is to protect civilians and to support the national army to become a stronger, more accountable force.'

One of the worst human rights offenders is the government army, which is poorly paid and ill-disciplined. In July 2009, the DRC government said there would be zero tolerance for soldiers who abused civilians, but elements of the army still prey on local people rather than protecting them.

‘Reform of the army needs to start with tangible actions concerning pay, the conditions of troops and impunity within the ranks,’ Stoessel continues. ‘There must be swift justice for perpetrators of rape, torture and murder.’

An election year in DRC, it is all the more important that the UN’s mandate prioritizes the most vulnerable and insecure areas of the country. There is a risk, experts say, that vital peacekeeping resources could be diverted to managing the election process.

Aid agencies have called on the UN to increase patrols in areas at risk of attack and to communicate more regularly with local people. MONUSCO must do more with the limited resources it has to respond to threats, and more resources must be made available to it.

As the UN reviews its mandate, it needs to move faster and more effectively to provide protection to people like Abau Adua.

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