

ADDRESSING THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN UNDER THE ADDIS ABABA PEACE, SECURITY AND COOPERATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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The capture of the city of Goma¹ in November 2012 by the rebel group known as the Movement of 23 March (M23)² exacerbated the suffering of women and children in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In order to end the conflict in eastern DRC, peace stakeholders in the DRC signed the Addis Ababa Peace and Security Co-operation Framework (PSCF) for the DRC and Great Lakes region. This article analyses the extent to which the PSCF for the DRC addresses the plight of women and children in the eastern region of the DRC.

¹ Goma is the provincial capital of the North Kivu province in the eastern DRC.

² M23 is the rebel movement created in 2012 by former Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP) rebels who joined the National Army following the Goma Accord. The Peace agreement (Goma Accord) was signed by the Congolese government and the rebel movement named CNDP on 23 March 2009 in Goma (North Kivu province),

[http://www.iccwomen.org/publications/Peace Agreement between the Government and the CNDP.pdf](http://www.iccwomen.org/publications/Peace%20Agreement%20between%20the%20Government%20and%20the%20CNDP.pdf). Accessed on 25/2/2015.

From Kampala to the signing of the PSCF in Addis Ababa

Following the inconclusive Kampala peace talks between the Congolese government and M23, the PSCF was signed in Addis Ababa, on 23 February 2013 by eleven countries³ as well as the representatives of the UN, the African Union (AU), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The PSCF enjoined the Congolese government to take into account the situation of women and children through the implementation of particular policies and establishment of relevant institutions in relation to remedy and reparation for victims.

Why the PSCF called for a specific focus on Women and Children?

The DRC now has the morbid label of “rape capital of the world”.⁴ In the eastern part of the DRC, women have been targeted by all parties in conflict where women’s bodies become another battleground.⁵ Sexual violence remains a major human rights concern, in both its scope and its systematic nature, particularly in the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Orientale.⁶

According to the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) report,⁷ the period between January 2010 and December 2013 saw a marked increase in incidences of sexual violence.⁸

Used as a strategic weapon of war⁹ in eastern DRC, the sexual assault of women resulted into undesirable pregnancies and HIV infections, forced divorce as well as the dismantling of the family unit and livelihoods. Moreover, women and children are particularly vulnerable to poverty and poor food security due to the protracted conflict. Small-scale farming has traditionally allowed women to contribute to the family’s economy as informal traders. As the African idiom goes, “*feeding a woman is feeding a nation*”. Unfortunately, the conflict has restricted women’s (farmers) access to farming land and markets for trade.

³ Eleven countries signatories of the PSCF are Angola, Burundi, the Central Africa Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

⁴ FIDH. 2013. DRC: Victims of sexual violence rarely obtain justice and never receive reparation, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_rdc.pdf. Accessed on 25/4/2015.

⁵ FIDH. 2013. DRC: Victims of sexual violence rarely obtain justice and never receive reparation, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_rdc.pdf. Accessed on 25/4/2015.

⁶ United Nations. 2013. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo, <http://www.monusco.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=YAvAUg06Xc%3d&tabid=10770&mid=13783&language=en-US>. Accessed on 16/3/2015.

⁷ United Nations Joint Human Rights Office. 2014. Progress and obstacles in the fight against impunity for sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, http://www.monusco.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Gyh_dUBNGcs%3D&tabid=10770&mid=13783&language=en-US. Accessed on 16/3/2015.

⁸ United Nations Joint Human Rights Office. 2014. Progress and obstacles in the fight against impunity for sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, http://www.monusco.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Gyh_dUBNGcs%3D&tabid=10770&mid=13783&language=en-US. Accessed on 16/3/2015.

⁹ Baaz, E.M and Stern, M. 2010. The Complexity of Violence: A critical analysis of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Uppsala Sweden: The Nordic Africa Institute.

Political will in addressing the plight of women and children in the DRC

The Congolese government established the *Mécanisme de Suivi*¹⁰ as a national institution responsible for implementing the PSCF recommendations. Since its establishment, the *Mécanisme de Suivi* has focused more on the socio-political integration of former M23 leaders and combatants (perpetrators) by granting them the amnesty while ignoring justice and healing for victims (women and children) of the conflict. In the addition, up until now, the victims of conflict in the eastern DRC are still suffering war trauma due to the nonexistence of a reconciliation process that will encourage perpetrators to acknowledge and repent from their past wrongs and seek forgiveness from the victims. Therefore, in fulfilling its mandate, the *Mécanisme de Suivi* has not designed any appropriate remedy and reparation program in terms of psycho-social support for abused women and children in the eastern DRC.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding its strengths, the dark side in the implementation of the PSCF is that the *Mécanisme de Suivi* seems to focus on the fate of former M23 combatants rather than providing a psycho-social rehabilitation to women and children) in eastern DRC. Despite the establishment of the *Mécanisme de Suivi* by the Congolese government, there is a long way to go for women and children to duly benefit from reparation as specified in the PSCF due to the slow progress towards security sector, legal and judicial reform as well as the establishment of the truth and reconciliation commission in the DRC.

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¹⁰ The *Mécanisme de Suivi* is French for oversight Mechanism established by the Congolese government on 13 May 2013, <http://www.digitalcongo.net/article/91954>. Accessed on 29/12/2014.

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