

**United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Protecting civilians & consolidating peace in the
Democratic Republic of Congo**

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United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

The United Nations Peacekeeping initiative is an answer to deal with the world's most complicated conflicts, usually in countries where the economic conditions are beyond subpar compared to relatively stable nations.

Some regions in the world are just unable to control the escalation of domestic or international conflicts, which end up affecting a great part of the population. This is when the UN establish a resolution to start a Peacekeeping Operation.

Currently there are 14 Peacekeeping Ops around the world. The task are diverse; protecting civilians, ensuring peaceful government transitions, disarmament, and some other movements related to general security.

The Democratic Republic of Congo before the UN resolution 1925

Probably one of the most suffered countries in Africa during the colonization time and it's transition to "democracy" is the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Having different names since its independence - Belgian Congo, Zaire, DR Congo- living conditions haven't changed for this nation, authoritarianism, corruption, poverty, lack of education.

In order to understand the conditions in the DRC before the United Nations resolved to interfere, conflicts in neighbor countries have to be explained, because Uganda and mostly Rwanda had been involved in DRC struggles during the 90's.

A triggering incident of the prevailing confrontation were the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 generated by the clash of two local tribes, which displaced more than 800,000 Rwandans to the DRC as refugees. A new government in Rwanda seeked to exterminate the refugees at DRC and

promoted violent groups -of Congolese people- with that goal in mind, a movement that ended up bringing down the Congolese Government in 1997.

New conflicts arrived with the new DRC president, who decided to displace the very same groups that brought him to power. It's worth to mention that the living conditions for civilians didn't improve in any sense during his mandate. A new rebel movement emerged, the Congolese Rally for Democracy and it was supported by Uganda and Rwanda.

The UN resolved to call for a ceasefire on behalf the respect of the Congo sovereignty, so the resolution 1279 of 1999 was emitted. The operation was to follow up a ceasefire agreement between the countries involved.

The agreement didn't work and confrontation between armed groups promoted by the government of DC Congo, and groups from Uganda and Rwanda turned into a profitable conflict at the mining eastern region .

In 2006 the Democratic Republic of Congo had their first free elections. Former president Kabila's son was elected and nothing much changed.

Conditions on the Ground Today

The UN operations forces for the mission established in 1999 remained in Congo. After 2010 the designation of the mission transformed into the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO,) referring to a new stage of the conflict as well as new measures to take.

According to the UN Peacekeeping official website:

“The new mission is authorized to use all means necessary to fulfill its mandate, in particular to ensure the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel and human rights personnel under threat. imminent physical violence and to support the Government of the DRC in its stabilization and peacebuilding efforts.” monusco.unmissions.org/à-propos.

There is some additional data from UN Peacekeeping that can help to understand the actual situation, the deployed personnel as of January 2019 goes up to 20,501. Most part of this personnel are contingent troops, and the rest is distributed in civilians, experts, police, volunteers and others.

Being one of the most impressive deployments the UN has in the actuality, the results are not so satisfying. It has past 9 years since the resolution 1925 was emitted, 20 years if the previous resolution 1279 is taken in count. Although what it was considered the “African World War” ended during the previous mission, rebel groups are still running free in Uganda, Rwanda and DRC.

The Democratic Republic of Congo seems slightly more politically stable after one decade, but some sources as the China Global Television Network consider that rebel groups in this African region are growing.

Violence hasn’t stopped, from the peacekeeping forces have 179 casualties, civilians casualties are more difficult to calculate but displacements of thousands occurs every year. The situation could be worst in escalation if MONUSCO were not present in the area, they have been collaborating reinforcing the local police forces, collecting information of civilians about their needs, and trying to ensure that elections and trancisions run with the less possible violence.

The main factor is that armed groups are not just a couple but dozens of them. Violations, killings, kidnappings and extortions are not only coming from rebels but also from the corrupt government.

Prospects for a Resolution

It is not easy to answer why peacekeeping hasn't been able to find a definitive peaceful end in this conflict.

Peacekeeping MONUSCO is supposed to work along with the government and local authorities, their mission isn't taking care of all the problems by themselves, or just violate Congo's sovereignty. Once again they're dealing with an authoritarian repressive regime from whom they won't find any significant collaboration, at least until a real democratic leader takes power.

There aren't good news either from the current American administration to this mission in DR Congo. Trump position about peacekeeping and the UN in general is to reduce expenses, some MONUSCO bases were already closed in 2018.

Increasing peacekeeping budget and in consequence all the operating troops in Africa won't solve a conflict that has been there since the African nations gained their independence, it will keep civilians safer though. MONUSCO has contributed in some way to diminish civilian casualties, they haven't been a real obstacle for rebels but their operations on civilian preparation and demobilizing small armed groups has shown results, they have saved lives.

In conclusion, the solution has to come from Democratic Republic of Congo -and neighbor countries like Rwanda,- there is no real sign of progress when all the actors are violent

groups -including the government. Poverty is always there to aggravate the problem, the lack of infrastructure, organization and in the long run educational factors are also taking away peace from Congolese people.

An alternative actor is now on play, China is making investments negotiating infrastructure in exchange of goods, and collecting profits in the long term. That's something uncommon in the region, the EU and US have seen to take part on the business resources in Congo without taking any strong actions.

China's actions are debated for some analyst as a neo colonialism, for others as a high risk. In a decade it might be possible to evaluate if those investments made any change, or how was the behavior or investments and economical activity against corruption and violence.

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