

## Peace is illusive in eastern Congo; A new report says

(KAMPALA 24 March 2010) North Kivu Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo is bound to remain in perpetual conflict if questions of identity, citizenship, good governance and justice are not urgently addressed.

In a research published today titled "*Who Belongs Where? Conflict, Displacement, Land and Identity in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo*" published by **International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI)** in partnership with the New York based **Social Science Research Council (SSRC)**, the report presents views of the ongoing conflict in the east of the country from the perspective of those displaced by it – both refugees and internally displaced.

Based on 157 qualitative interviews conducted in North Kivu and western Uganda, the paper explores the interaction between identity, access to power and, in turn, access to resources – including land.

The findings show that the conflict is seen as having been imported from Rwanda in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide: it is a conflict from "out there" that is now being fought on Congolese soil.

At the same time there is recognition that the conflict has drawn upon fractures at a local level that predate the 1994 genocide but have been exacerbated with increased militarisation in the area.

These external and internal factors are seen to converge around the question of ethnicity. Ethnic identities are used as the basis for inclusion or exclusion of particular populations, mainly those speaking variants of the Kinyarwanda language.

The report found that ultimately the conflict is about defining who has a legitimate claim of Congolese identity which in turn is necessary to gain access to power and resources that are inherently determined on the basis of such an identity.

Although DRC in 2004 adopted a new citizenship law on nationality that was intended to permanently clarify who is or is not a national of Congo, the law is neither being applied nor absorbed and has not helped to redefine local understandings of inclusion and exclusion. As a result, ethnic identities continue to be manipulated by militias and other groups and have become a source of profound instability.

Within this context, the risk of renewed deterioration in the security situation is palpable. Indeed, the report is published as a new military offensive, Amani Leo, gets underway in eastern DRC against the *Forces Démocratiques de Liberation du Rwanda* (FDLR), a rebel group that formed in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide and includes in its ranks significant numbers of *genocidaires*.

The findings resonate with analyses of earlier phases of the conflict that emphasised the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion that lie at the heart of the violence. The cyclical forces that drive the conflict at a local level have not been broken. The ebb and flow of the war – reduced hostility leading to increased optimism for sustainable peace followed by renewed bouts of fighting – could persist indefinitely if root causes are not addressed.

Within this context, it is important to balance attention focused on ongoing military operations, which can only have a palliative impact, with a similar commitment to addressing root causes.

Yet despite the lack of clear resolution to the conflict, refugees and IDPs are returning home – not least due to the difficult circumstances of their displacement. For return to be sustainable, creating solutions to these deep-rooted and entrenched challenges are vital, and the report says that addressing questions of identity, implementation of the 2004 citizenship law. The report also says that deconstructing ethnic differences of Hutu and Tutsi within the Great lakes region was vital in ending the continued cycles of violence and possibility of renewed armed conflict.

*For more information, contact Dismas Nkunda, Co-Director, IRRI ([dismas.nkunda@refugee-rights.org](mailto:dismas.nkunda@refugee-rights.org)) or Lucy Hovil, Senior Researcher, IRRI ([lucy.hovil@refugee-rights.org](mailto:lucy.hovil@refugee-rights.org))*