

# Democratic Republic of the Congo

## Civil War Brief

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The war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), is the widest interstate war in modern African history. Congo has become an environment in which numerous foreign players have become involved, some within the immediate sub-region, and more worrisome in fact, some from much further afield. That only serves to complicate the situation and to make peaceful resolution of the conflict that much more complex. The war, centred mainly in eastern Congo, has involved nine African nations and directly affected the lives of 50 million Congolese.

Most of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) is ruled by President Laurent Desire Kabila, whose Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) overthrew the authoritarian regime of Mobutu Sese Seko by armed force in 1997. The country's dilapidated transportation and communications infrastructure impairs central Government control.

By the end of 1998, the Government had lost control of more than one-third of the country's territory to a rebel organization, the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), dominated by members of the Tutsi ethnic minority. Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi were behind the rebel movement that tried to topple Congolese President Laurent Kabila. The rebellion started in early August 1998, when Kabila tried to expel from the country Rwandan military forces that had helped him overthrow Mobutu, and upon which the Congolese Tutsis and the governments of Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi all relied for protection from hostile nongovernmental armed groups operating out of the eastern part of the country. These groups included:

- the Interahamwe militia of ethnic Hutus, mostly from Rwanda, which fought the Tutsi-dominated Government of Rwanda;
- Hutu members of the former Rwandan Armed Forces, believed to be responsible for the 1994 genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda, which also fought the Government of Rwanda;
- the Mai Mai, a loose association of traditional Congolese local defense forces, which fought the influx of Rwandan immigrants;
- the Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF), made of up Ugandan expatriates and supported by the Government of Sudan, which fought the Government of Uganda;
- several groups of Hutus from Burundi fighting the Tutsi-dominated Government of Burundi.

In the ensuing civil war, elements of the armed forces of Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda operated inside the country in support of the rebels; elements of the armed forces of Angola, Chad, Namibia, and Zimbabwe operated inside the country in support of the Government; and the nongovernmental armed groups mentioned above operated inside the country on the side of the Government, often as guerrillas inside RCD-occupied territory. Uganda sought to stop attacks by rebels sponsored by Sudan and operating

through eastern Congo while Rwanda and Burundi were out to stop the incursion of Hutu insurgents into their territories. None of the three countries felt inclined to back a cease-fire agreement that did not address their border security concerns.

In a ceremony in Lusaka on 21 August 1999, all elements of the Congo's rebel forces signed the Lusaka peace agreement. The truce was signed by representatives of the different factions of the divided Rally for Democracy whose rival factions are backed by Rwanda and Uganda respectively and who have been seeking to overthrow President Kabila's government since August 1998. The ceasefire was part of a Zambia-brokered agreement reached on 10 July by the six nations involved: DRC, Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Uganda and Rwanda. On 10 November 1999, agreement was reached on the deployment of United Nations technical survey teams in 13 rebel- and government-held territories. The survey teams will assess the areas for the eventual deployment of UN military liaison officers who will monitor the ceasefire conditions.

Under the Lusaka agreement a regional multinational force would be comprised of troops from belligerent and possibly non-belligerent countries and would be controlled by a regional Joint Military Commission (JMC) consisting of belligerent nations and established by the Lusaka agreement to work out mechanisms for the tracking, disarming, cantoning, and documenting of all armed groups in the DRC, especially those forces identified with the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The JMC force would be in addition to the agreement-implementing group of up to 90 military liaison officers the U.N. Security Council has begun to deploy to the DRC, Lusaka, and the warring capitals to help in implementing the Lusaka cease-fire agreement signed last August.

Each side in the 15-month conflict has repeatedly accused the other of violating the Lusaka accord, which now seems to exist only on paper. As of late December 1999 the deteriorating military and security situation suggested that the slightest incident could trigger large-scale organized attacks against civilians, especially ethnic Tutsis. Given the threat to the Congolese Tutsi community, they themselves could trigger an anti-Tutsi offensive through violent actions against their neighbours.