

## ESTABLISHING A NEW ARMY FOR THE DRC: UPDATE ON THE FARDC

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Despite the signature of comprehensive agreements after rounds of protracted negotiations, restoring order in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has proven to be a slow and incomplete process. The eastern provinces of North and South Kivu and the Ituri District in *Province Orientale* in the north-east are still subject to sporadic outbreaks of fighting. In fact, Ituri remains largely under the control of rival militias, although a strengthened United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force is gradually restoring security there.

The government is also struggling to establish proper control of areas previously under rebel administration, while civilians in many parts of the country still face hardship in the form of chronic shortages of food, water and other basic needs. The International Committee to Accompany the Transition (CIAT) has expressed concern with what it calls “delays in implementation of the transition programmes and by the political tensions and obstacles observed of late”.

Nevertheless, while a number of initial steps towards reconstructing (some would say, creating) an integrated Congolese National Army were taken, this critical component of the transition’s agenda is proceeding in a painfully slow manner. In this sense, while a draft law on Defence and the Armed Forces was approved by the Council of Ministers in January 2004 and by the National Assembly at the end of June 2004, the Senate and the pres-

ident are yet to sign on the proposed bill. Similar to several key unresolved issues pertaining to the transition, military integration seems to be plagued by competing agendas within the transitional government and a critical lack of confidence and trust between former belligerents. In addition, and of major concern to the transitional government, funding for the military reform process (estimated at approximately \$547 million solely for the formation of a new army) has not been forthcoming. Furthermore, the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC’s) impact on the current situation is at best limited: there is no doubt that the large-scale demonstrations against MONUC in major cities of the DRC in early July—which followed the sharp deterioration of the security situation in the east of the country—have diminished the organisation’s clout.

The main objective of the draft law referred to above is the establishment of a Congolese National Army, the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC). According to the proposed law, while the Head of State holds the function of supreme commander of the FARDC, he must consult with the Higher Defence Council (HDC), the government, the National Assembly and the Senate before taking key decisions such as declaring war or a state of emergency. Nevertheless, the HDC is yet to meet.

Outside the HDC framework, and at bilat-

eral level, the Belgium government and the Congolese Ministry of Defence have developed a plan for military reintegration and demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR). A second draft of this national DDR plan indicates that there are currently up to 330,000 combatants and that at least 200,000 need to be demobilised—current force level estimates for a future FARDC are approximately 130,000 men and women.

The joint Belgian–Congolese planning group identified two options for military reintegration and DDR. The first, a fast-paced one, foresees the opening of 25 quartering/orientation centres throughout the country, which would proceed with the identification and registration process of all combatants in approximately three months. The second, a longer-term plan, foresees the opening of only seven orientation centres in the country as a whole, but will require one year for the identification and registration process. Both plans followed conventional practice in DDR programmes, including the quartering and/or re-groupment of combatants in orientation centres, as well as information and sensitisation activities not only for former combatants but for the civilian population in general. Nevertheless, as will be discussed below, the process as a whole is being held back because the transitional government has not yet been able to decide on the command of the Integration Military Structure (IMS)—the structure that will supervise demobilisation and reinsertion nationally (a commission has been created for these purposes, the *Commission Nationale de Démobilisation et Réinsertion*, CONADER).

The transitional government approved the National DDR Plan in late July 2004 and is now busy with the support of MONUC, drawing up the operational details of the plan. It is envisaged that disarmament and demobilisation will take place where the Congolese-formed units are already located or at locations close to the 11 static orientation centres (three sites in Kinshasa, as well as sites in Kimbinga, Basankusu, Kisangani, Rumangabo, Shabunda, Kananga, Kamina and Lubumbashi) or through one of the seven

mobile orientation centres. At the orientation centres, these elements will be registered and briefed on demobilisation and the eligibility criteria for joining the integrated military structures. Those who choose to remain in the military structures will be taken to one of the six *centres de brassage* for further screening, where a decision will be taken as to their future assignments.

While the funding associated with demobilisation and reintegration will be covered by the Multi-Donor Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme of the World Bank, work still remains to finalise the operational plans necessary to implement several aspects of the process. Operational details such as the timing and modalities for reintegration remain outstanding—in this regard, a South African National Defence Force task team is currently helping the FARDC to set up the IMS and work out the details of outstanding operational plans. Following a South African delegation visit to Kinshasa over the period 5–9 June 2004 and a visit by FARDC officers to South Africa during the same month, a bilateral agreement providing for South African support to the security sector reform (SSR) process was signed.

The issue of SSR—specifically the DDR of the different Congolese armed groups—remains one of the biggest threats to a successful transition in the DRC. The urgent need for the establishment of the FARDC was again reinforced by renewed fighting in Bukavu, where different armed groups still roam around under their own command-and-control structures. The largely ad hoc deployment of 10,000–15,000 FARDC soldiers from Kinshasa to fight General Nkunda's break-away faction in the east made the situation worse rather than better.

As far as SSR issues are concerned, and taking into account bilateral agreements, MONUC has recently set up a Security Sector Reform Cell to coordinate all international efforts to support the integration of former combatants into the new Congolese Armed Forces. Yet, while coordination of international assistance is critical, the ability of MONUC to channel assistance to the SSR

process in an efficient and timely manner demands the swift approval by the Senate and the president of the draft law on Defence and the Armed Forces. All programmes currently developed for SSR (and within it DDR) may in fact be rendered useless if the government and other institutions of the transition fail to rectify the draft law, leaving a vacuum on critical issues such as force levels and command structures of the new FARDC, the development of a national defence strategy and what criteria will ultimately be applied for reintegration into the new army.