

# CONCLUSION

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The tenacity of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been a source of great concern to the Great Lakes region of Africa. As such it has generated enormous interest for policy analysts and researchers, among others. The findings of these efforts to better understand and respond to the conflict should not only document the events behind the conflict, but more importantly inform policy makers within the DRC and the rest of the world, of the critical need to combine efforts in order to recreate peace in the DRC.

Disarmament is one component of peace building and a recognized need in the DRC as the transitional government embarks on initiatives to rebuild the country. The fundamental aim of disarmament is to increase human security. Historical experience shows that unrestrained arms transfers can lead to uncontrolled arms build-up and an escalation in the risk of conflict. This has been well documented in the DRC and other countries in the Great Lakes region.

Armed combatants need to be disarmed and demobilized when war is over, and including DDR in peace agreements is increasingly common. The success of a disarmament process, however, depends on how it is planned and executed. It also depends on the bearing the conflict takes as it terminates. An armed conflict can either end with the defeat of one side or with a ceasefire being negotiated.

Where a conflict ends with the defeat of one side, it is usually the vanquished party that is disarmed and demobilized, while in a ceasefire situation impartiality and balancing interests is vital sustainability and post conflict peace building. However, in both cases extreme care needs to be taken when reintegrating former combatants into society, to prevent them from taking up arms at a later stage, or resorting to crime. The presence of impartial forces such as the UN peacekeepers or forces of a regional body may assist in ensuring compliance during disarmament and during post-conflict reconstruction.

The introduction to this monograph therefore presented an analysis of the essentials of disarmament, putting emphasis on key issues of planning, such as the need to define categories of people targeted for disarmament and types of weapons expected in the collection. The first chapter evaluated the evolution of the concept of disarmament in post-Cold War era, highlighting factors that underpin the UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. The chapter concluded with an observation of some of the challenges and lessons learnt from previous cases of disarmament in Africa.

The second chapter traced the evolution of peace support operations (PSOs), before assessing Western countries' will to intervene in African conflicts. The chapter ended with an evaluation of emerging challenges that peacekeeping missions face during disarmament.

Disarmament as it was conducted in Sierra Leone under the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was analysed to determine its relevance as a model of successful disarmament in Africa. While the DRC case study motivated the need for disarmament as an important component of post-conflict reconstruction. The chapter concluded with some basic observations that may add value to the entire DDR process in the DRC.

The objective of this monograph has been to underscore the importance of an effective disarmament process within the context of post conflict peace building. The purpose of the disarmament programme must be clear to all those who will be involved and the commitment of those tasked with carrying out the programme should be evident to all. Disarmament however cannot be divorced from the dynamics of evolving peace and planners should recognize the systematic flexibility that is required in order to make these programmes work. In February 2004, the government of Sierra Leone announced the conclusion of a five-year programme to disarm and rehabilitate more than 70,000 former combatants. The World Bank noted that Sierra Leone is being visited by neighbouring countries and those from the Great Lakes region because it is "considered as the best practice example throughout the world of a successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme".<sup>1</sup> With this monograph, the authors hope that other successful DDR programmes can be realized across Africa in the coming months and years.

## Notes

1. "No more illegal armed groups in Sierra Leone" *Mail and Guardian Online*, 5 February 2004, [www.mg.co.za/Content/13.asp?ao=30676](http://www.mg.co.za/Content/13.asp?ao=30676).