

Canadian Conflict Resolution Expert Gets On-the-Ground Insight into the DR Congo Conflict

Dr. Glenys A. Babcock, President of Pragmora, recently returned from the DR Congo where she talked with diverse groups and explored pragmatic options for peace stabilization

TORONTO, June 16, 2010 — Dr. Glenys A. Babcock, President of Pragmora and conflict resolution specialist, has just returned from a 10-day research trip to the DR Congo. In Kinshasa and Goma, she held in-depth discussions on the security and humanitarian situation and explored peace stabilisation options with diverse government, security, mining, civil society, and international aid organisations.

On June 30, the DR Congo will celebrate its 50th Anniversary of Independence — while the simmering conflict continues, and the prospect for out of control violence in the next 12 to 24 months grows higher.

"The whole pot is boiling," says Dr. Babcock. "Renewed violence in the Congo would likely not only affect the local Congolese people, but also shake the foundations of peace in neighbouring Rwanda and Sudan."

There are two imminent changes that account for the bleak outlook. First, at the insistence of President Joseph Kabila, the UN must withdraw 2000 peacekeepers in the next two weeks, prior to the June 30 Independence celebrations. A full pull out of the MONUC peacekeepers is to be completed in 2011. (MONUC is the largest peacekeeping mission in the world with about 20,000 members). It seems extremely unlikely that the Congolese army alone will be able to maintain peace and protect civilians from rebel groups, especially when the army itself has been blamed for incidents of violence against civilians, looting, rape, and minerals trafficking.

The second potentially destabilizing factor is the planned return of tens of thousands of people who became internally displaced in the Congo or refugees in neighbouring countries as a result of the war. Such post-conflict resettlements are typically filled with tension. In the case of the DR Congo, resettlement from the Rwanda refugee camps will put conflicting tribal groups together again, including resettling refugee Hutus into Tutsi-dominated communities.

As one humanitarian aid worker in the eastern Kivu region noted, "When this blows, it all blows."

While in the DR Congo, Glenys met with both Congolese and international organisations, including the UN's top representative in the country for MONUC (the UN peacekeeping mission), the DR Congo's Minister of Mines, Secretary General of the national women's lawyer association, and representatives of various NGOS, such as International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Search for Common Ground and Norwegian Refugee Council.

About Dr. Babcock

Dr. Glenys Babcock is Pragmora's spokesperson for conflict and related economic, political and humanitarian issues for the DR Congo, Sri Lanka, Georgia (Abkhazia/South Ossetia), Liberia and Somalia. Dr. Babcock is the President of Pragmora and a specialist in conflict resolution. For more than 20 years, she provided strategic counsel and research to preeminent public, private and not-for-profit organisations. She holds a PhD and MPhil in public policy analysis, and an MA and BA in international relations.

About Pragmora

Pragmora is both a policy think tank and a grassroots activist group. Based in Canada, it works with experts around the world to develop realistic, nonpartisan, nonviolent measures to help resolve and prevent conflicts, and to stabilize the peace in post-conflict regions. www.pragmora.org

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