

Congos Catastrophe
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Caught up in a spasmodic civil war, civilians in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo are suffering a humanitarian catastrophe. Some 250,000 have been driven from their homes. The displaced as well as those who stayed in their villages are preyed upon by rebel, foreign, and government soldiers alike. And the victims receive no protection from the undermanned United Nations peacekeepers - 17,000 in the entire country, just 5,400 in the east.

This is a many-sided conflict over ethnic resentments, control of rich mineral resources, and the pure pursuit of power. Its antecedents are in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, when a Hutu supremacist regime in Rwanda murdered an estimated 800,000 Tutsis. After the Tutsis' Patriotic Front overthrew the genocidal Hutu regime, many Hutu fighters fled into eastern Congo.

Their presence there ignited a war that lasted from 1998 to 2003, drawing in troops from several African countries, including Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Angola. And now the unextinguished members of that conflict have flared up into another conflagration. ()

An even sadder spectacle is the abject failure of the UN mission to Congo. Just this week, the Security Council postponed until Nov. 26 a request by Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon for 3,000 more peacekeepers. This refusal to save lives and to act against the raping of women and girls in eastern Congo makes a mockery of the UN's avowed **responsibility to protect** civilians who are threatened by their own government.

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