

Francis Deng
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In the context of the recent escalation in violence in the North Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Francis Deng, undertook a mission to the Great Lakes region from 23 November to 4 December 2008. In the DRC and the neighboring countries of Rwanda and Uganda, he met with Government ministers, representatives of UN bodies, civil society, the Catholic Church and victims of atrocities. Members of his team also visited Burundi on 25-26 November and met with UN representatives and members of the civil society.

Considering the situation in DRC throughout 2008, the Special Adviser has examined whether the rampant violence and massive human rights abuses in North Kivu could be indicative of the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such, in the words of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Having witnessed the situation first-hand, the Special Adviser found that massive violations of international human rights and humanitarian law were being committed on the basis of ethnicity and national origin in the DRC. While there are many ethnic groups in the country, the principal cleavages are on one hand, the Tutsis, represented by CNDP (National Congress for the Defense of the People), and on the other hand, a variety of ethnic groups, among whom those prominent are the Hutus represented by FDLR (Democratic Front of the Liberation of Rwanda), and the Hunde, the Nande and the Nyanga, some of whom converge in the armed groups of PARECO (Coalition of Congolese Patriotic Resistance) and Mayi Mayi.

The Special Adviser met with some of the leaders of the major armed groups and community leaders in the eastern part of DRC. They all claimed that their groups have been victims of recurrent genocides in the history of the country. Most non-Tutsi leaders with whom the Special Adviser met accused the Tutsis of perpetrating genocide and suggested that it would only be a matter of time before the victim groups turn against them with genocidal vengeance. All these allegations and counter-allegations were made with conviction and emotive fervor, that can incite followers into genocidal violence. The Special Adviser was also informed that messages fomenting ethnic hatred were being broadcast by some local radios and used by leaders of political parties. The Special Adviser recalls that while the primary responsibility to prevent genocide rests with the state, it is widely acknowledged that the governance and defense capacity of the DRC has been severely weakened. Support of the Government through MONUC can help protect civilians but cannot substitute for the state. The Special Adviser is deeply concerned by these findings.

With a view to preventing genocide, the Special Adviser urges all parties to the conflict to put an end to all atrocities and work urgently towards a political solution that will bring comprehensive and sustainable peace to the DRC by addressing the root causes, in particular the legitimate concerns of all actors with respect to sharing political power and the benefits of national development and resource allocation. Furthermore, the Special Adviser urges all leaders, in the DRC and beyond, to work towards ethnic reconciliation and to put an end to all activities that result in the stigmatization of certain ethnic groups and may encourage genocide.

Considering that the problems and interests of the countries in the region are interconnected, an approach that will turn the present crisis into an opportunity for comprehensive regional cooperation must be pursued. This should be one of the principal objectives of the UN and AU Special Envoys to the DRC and the Great Lakes region. It should begin with bilateral agreements with the two immediate neighbors directly implicated in the situation in the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda, then eventually cover all the countries in the Great Lakes region towards security and economic cooperation and integration. Elements of such an arrangement are already in place, but need to be consolidated and internationally supported.

Source: <http://www.un.org/preventgenocide/adviser/state3.shtml>