

Steps Towards Justice, Frustrated Hopes: Reflecting on the Impact of the ICC in Ituri International Refugee Rights Initiative

12 March 2012

'Steps Towards Justice, Frustrated Hopes' is the second in a series of papers developed by ICRtoP member International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), in collaboration with local partners in Africa, to reflect local perspectives on experiences with international justice. The paper aims to open a dialogue on the successes and failures of the international justice experiment in Africa, and develop recommendations for a more productive and effective engagement going forward.

On 14 March 2012, the International Criminal Court (ICC) will hand down its first verdict in the case of former rebel leader Thomas Lubanga of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As Iturians anxiously await the verdict, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the impact that the investigation and trial, alongside other activities of the ICC, have had in Lubanga's native Ituri district. In an effort to bring the voices and concerns of Iturians to the fore in this reflection, the International Refugee Rights Initiative and our Iturian partner organization, the Association pour la promotion et la défense de la dignité des victimes (APRODIVI), today launched a report "Steps Towards Justice, Frustrated Hopes: Some Reflections on the Experience of the International Criminal Court in Ituri". (...) (...) The region of Ituri in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been one of the most heavily conflict-affected regions in the country over the last two decades. Violence in the DRC over this time has revolved around two national wars that have pitted numerous rebel groups and international actors against each other in a vicious struggle for resources, political control and security. In Ituri, these national dynamics have intersected with, and exacerbated, tensions between the Hema and Lendu ethnic groups who live in the region. (...)

(...) For many in the DRC the intervention of the ICC offered significant hope. Impunity had been seen as a major obstacle to peace and democratic governance. (...) DRC civil society advocates saw the ICC as a useful tool in the larger battle to end impunity, and their advocacy was reportedly instrumental in ensuring that the situation in eastern DRC was ultimately referred to the ICC. (...)

(...) Following the referral, the Court began its investigations in Ituri. The investigation quickly focused on the leaders of ethnically aligned militias who were both fighting each other and participating in the broader national conflict.

Eight years later, and with the first trials winding to a close, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the Court's involvement in the region and compare its impact to the aspirations and expectations that were raised by its initial engagement.

The proceedings at the Hague have garnered significant attention, both within Ituri and at the international level, and have generally been welcomed as part of the broader international fight against impunity. But how are these proceedings perceived on the ground in Ituri? Has the promise of an end to impunity and to a peaceful future for those in Ituri been delivered?

As the population in Ituri awaits the first trial judgement in the case of Thomas Lubanga, this paper offers some reflections on these questions, focusing on the views and opinions of those on the ground, those who have been closest to the violence. (...)

To read the press release, see [here](#) . To read the full report, see [here](#) .