

January 2008 DR Congo Trip Report

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Goal of the Trip

The goal of this January 2008 trip to DR Congo was:

- 1. To continue to monitor the political, economic and social environment and their impacts on our involvement in the country.*
- 2. To sign partnership agreements with PAREC Sud Kivu for projects related to Eastern Congo and with the Center for Peacebuilding, Leadership and Good Governance for projects related to peacebuilding in Congo.*
- 3. To launch several activities we have been working on during this past year. These activities are related to the commitment we made to collaborate with the Walungu Health Zone to provide physical and emotional healing and empowerment opportunities for women who have experienced sexual violence. Specifically, we had offered to provide peer counseling and training in trauma healing; management training and seed funding for micro-credit programs; sewing machines, supplies, and training for income-generation programs; supplies and training for doctors in OB/GYN surgeries at Walungu Hospital.*
- 4. To initiate partnership activities that promote security in the Walungu region by building relationships with grassroots peace and reconciliation groups in South Kivu. Specifically, we had agreed to participate in programs geared toward collecting and exchanging weapons for bicycles or tin roofing. It was hoped that weapons collected would then be destroyed, melted, and transformed into agricultural tools to be redistributed in the local communities.*
- 5. To initiate the documentary project that focused on women of the Walungu region who have been victims of sexual violence. By doing so, we hoped to provide them an opportunity to reclaim their voice and to help us all address the question, "What **can** be done?"*
- 6. To meet with MCC and SANRU regarding the possibility of supporting the Kajiji Health Zone that provides services to more than 150,000 people and yet without any financial support by national or international institutions.*
- 7. To finalize the plan for the development of the International Center for Professional Resourcing in Kinshasa.*
- 8. To participate in co-mediation of a conflict in one of the Congo Mennonite Conferences.*

9. *To nurture current relationships and develop new ones with the political, civil society, church, and professional communities.*

Team Composition

Initially the team was composed of Dr. Dalton Reimer, chair of MMH Hope; Dr. Gail Newel, Board member and Coordinator of Health Activities; Dr. Pakisa Tshimika, MMH Hope Executive Director; Dr. Kim Smith, OBGYN Consultant from Kenya; Jill Janzen, Artist from Bologna, Italy; Bruno Pegoretti, Artist from Bologna, Italy; Sarah Hagey, a filmmaker from San Francisco; and Rebekah Zemansky from Lawrence, Kansas.

*Due to current unrest in Kenya where Dr. Gail Newel was supposed to spend a week to get acquainted **with** the health issues among African women, we had to cancel travel for Dr. Gail Newel, Dr. Kim Smith, and Bruno Pegoretti. The rest of the team traveled to Congo as initially scheduled. Pakisa and Sarah arrived in Kinshasa several days later due to other commitments for Pakisa in Mainz, Germany and Strasbourg, France in relationship to his responsibilities with the Mennonite World Conference.*

In Congo we were joined by our Maurice Matsitsa and Serge Tshiwamp. Pascal Kulungu and Yvette Rubuye, representatives of our two major current partners were also part of the team during our time in the country. Our logistics were assured by Mama Clementine Kasiese Matondo. My colleague Tim Lind provided logistical support for all the activities relate to Mennonite World Conference. Suzanne Lind, MCC representative in Congo, was always available to assist as needed.

It is good to note that Dalton has already traveled with me to Congo on several occasions so this was not his first trip. However, it was the first one for Jill, Sarah, and Rebekah. The three of them were already connected to Congo because of family ties. Jill and Sarah are sisters to Gail and Tonya, respectively, who traveled to Congo with me in January and February 2007. Rebekah is my niece- my sister –in-law’s daughter, who grew up hearing about Congo since she was an infant.

New Era for the Congolese People

There is still a great sense of optimism since the country held its first democratic elections in more than 30 years. Most of the national institutions are operational – parliament, senate, and the central government. They were already planning the local and provincial elections when we visited Congo in January 2008. Congolese people are seeking for investors and not those who will continue to exploit them as many have done in the past. They want to be able to pay for health care for their families, pay for schooling for the children. Doctors, primary and high school teachers, university professors, and many involved in civil society are looking for ways to use local resources rather than always feeling like they have to beg for even simple resources from the international community.

Security is no longer a major issue for the most part of the country. A few spots in Eastern Congo are still a security problem but the Congolese people do not want those few spots to take the whole country hostage. More details of the security, political, and socio-economic environment are

included in appendix 1 of this report. We left the country feeling that a new era has begun in Congo and this new era also provides many new opportunities for those committed to truly walking alongside our brothers and sisters in Congo. There are still many vultures out there and true friends of Congolese people must pave the way that benefit the Congolese people and assure the future of this country known to be potentially rich. So far the potentialities of the country are not feeding the children of this great nation.

***The New Congo** - In the 19th century post-Civil War period in the United States, the south of our country came to be characterized by some as “the new South.” While on this visit in Congo, this historic characterization of a region of our country kept going through my mind as a way of characterizing what is happening in Congo – “the new Congo.” Congo is changing, and one sees evidence of this in ways both small (e.g. taxis are now required to be painted yellow in Kinshasa) to big (the multi-billion dollar recent development agreement with China). As in the South of the post-Civil War period, much remains uncertain about the future. But there are moments in time that represent unique opportunities for engagement and change. This is such a moment in Congo. Those who engage these moments have the opportunity to help shape the future. While this entails risk, without risk there is no future and history will pass us by.*

For me, each visit to Congo has further confirmed a growing conviction that this is the time to be engaged. While we cannot match the billions of China, we can be strategic in coming alongside those on the ground who at the church and community levels are already working for change. China will likely not come alongside most of them, but we can. And that, too, can make a big

Launching of Planned Activities

- 1. Formal Agreements** - Given MMH Hope strategies to partner with local organizations, it was important to establish formal relationships with local partners with whom MMH Hope would work in implementing its activities in Congo. Consequently, it was also necessary to sign formal agreements with these local partners. Two such agreements were signed during this trip. The first one was with PAREC regarding activities in Eastern Congo. The second agreement was signed with the Center for Peacebuilding, Leadership and Good Governance for peace related activities.
- 2. Walungu Health Zone Training in OBGYN Surgeries Focusing on Fistula Repairs** - This part of planned activities was postponed due to unrest in Kenya which also forced us to cancel travel plans for Gail and Kim. They will most likely travel to Walungu in March or April 2008. Mama Makeka House of Hope is implementing this project in partnership with Mennonite Mission Health Association.
- 3. Walungu Health Zone Training in Trauma Healing Peer Counseling** - The representatives of COPARE, the potential partner for this aspect of our commitment were not available due to other commitments – a regional conference on peace and development of

Eastern Congo and a peace conference in Uganda. We will pick up this activity during our next visit to Congo.

4. ***Support for the Sewing Training Center*** - We provided funding for the purchase of sewing machines and supplies for the Walungu Hospital Center. Several machines were delivered in our presence and more will be purchased and delivered at a later time.
5. ***Training in Management of Micro Credit and Seed Funding*** - This trip provided an opportunity to continue the discussion on best approach to micro credit projects for women in the Walungu region. It was agreed that Yvette, our main partner in Bukavu, will need training from a Kinshasa based women's group that has developed a micro credit program that we visited last year and which seemed to have credibility in the country. We provided her with funding to visit the team in Kinshasa and planned the timing for training and additional planning for further support for the project in Walungu.
6. ***Weapon Exchange*** - Our commitment was to participate in PAREC programs geared towards collecting and exchanging weapons for bicycles or tin roofing. It was hoped that weapons collected would then be destroyed, melted, and transformed into agricultural tools to be redistributed in the local communities. We contributed funding for the purchase of roofing materials to be used during a public weapons exchange in Walungu. We attended the public event in the presence of the Governor of South Kivu, the Mayor of Walungu, representatives of the Provincial Police, Army, Civil Society, and other governmental and political institutions. A big crowd of men, women, and children came to witness this important event under the animation of a live band singing Gospel music.

Unfortunately not a single weapon was returned although more than 40 people had committed to do so the night before and a few hours before the ceremony began. There were hundreds more waiting to see how this event would end before they would commit to returning their own weapons during a public ceremony according to information we received from our local partner as well the security agent at the ceremony. A quick investigation showed that two factors contributed to people not depositing their weapons: a) weapons in the Walungu region had also been used to rape local women and there was a fear of retaliation if one would return the weapon in public; b) many women who had been raped were in the crowd and were determined to point out anyone who had participated in raping them. We agreed that PAREC would work with churches and other local partners to develop different strategies for private weapons collection and public weapons destruction.

7. ***Documentary Focusing on Walungu Women*** - The project involves telling stories of women from the Walungu region who have been victims of sexual violence. By doing so, we hoped to provide them an opportunity to reclaim their voice, and to help us all address the question, "What **can** be done?" We collected close to 25 hours footage of several of these women, local community development groups, high school youth, political, and civil society folks. We were not able to conduct interviews in the villages as we had hoped due to poor roads. This was

the first of many interviews planned for this two year project. We hope to continue collecting more stories and background information during the next six to twelve months.

Meeting with MCC and SANRU

*The meeting centered on the need for financial support for Kajiji and Mukedi Health Zones, both co-managed (**government and church**) by two of the three Mennonite Conferences in Congo. Three funding possibilities were considered:*

- *\$50,148 per health zone per year (Investment of 0.33 per inhabitant per year)*
- *\$100,296 per health zone per year (Investment of 0.67 per inhabitant per year)*
- *\$150,066 per health zone per year (Investment of 1.00 per inhabitant per year)*

The issue of administrative coordination of the project was left unresolved. It was agreed that MCC Congo will work with SANRU in proposing an administrative structure that will manage and monitor the implementation of the project. MCC will then call on other Mennonite and non Mennonite organizations interested or committed to supporting these two health zones. Mennonite Mission Health Association and Mama Makeka House of Hope are committed to participate but will wait to hear from MCC Congo as to how, when, and how much to contribute financially and administratively.

Final Plan International Center for Professional Resourcing

The mission of the MMH Hope International Center for Professional Resourcing is to provide an environment for educators, peacebuilders, and health professionals to develop and improve their knowledge and skills that will enable them to achieve their professional goals, improve the productivity of their organizations, and provide leadership and service to their communities.

In Kinshasa we met with potential beneficiaries and the architect to discuss the mission and objectives of the center and the construction project. There was a strong affirmation for the project and many people I talked with wished for a rapid implementation of the project. The architect worked on a blue print which Dalton and I looked at and suggested some changes. The final draft which includes the budget will be mailed to our office by the end of February. Mama Clementine is monitoring the work and the relationship with the architect.

The plan initially includes two buildings with offices, a large conference room, several meeting rooms, a restaurant, a library, space for professional virtual conferencing, and fifteen guest rooms. Two more lots are adjacent to our current one that could be purchased. If enough funds are raised for the project, those lots could be purchased to house additional 15 to 25 guest rooms and a Performing Art Center (see floor plans of the two buildings in appendix 2).

Co-Mediation of Conflict within the Mennonite Church of Congo

The details of the results of the meetings are included in a separate report. This report can be sent if requested.

Nurturing and Developing New Relationships

As an organization, we consider it very important to nurture and develop new relationships in Congo. This trip was not any different from the previous ones. In Eastern Congo, we visited several women's groups in Bukavu, more than 150 women who have experienced sexual violence in the Walungu region, and the Governor and the Head of the Military for South Kivu. In Kinshasa, we visited with one of the former Vice-Presidents, now a Senator, newly appointed Minister of Post, Telephone and Telecommunication, two Parliamentarians, Representatives of the Congo Women Entrepreneurial Association, Mennonite Conference leaders, and the Christian University of Kinshasa. There was more to learn from all these encounters.

Two new relationships need to be highlighted. Sarah visited one of the television stations to gain an understanding of the conditions under which Congolese media works. It was clear that we were better equipped than those working for this station. Two young people I have known for years are working for the station and offer many possibilities for assisting them with simple tools that will allow them to offer our brothers and sister access to reliable news and information.

The second was a visit to a medical clinic owned and managed by Dr. Bavi, a nationally known OBGYN. After several years of medical practice in Europe, he had decided to go back to Congo where he had worked as Medical Director in one of the largest hospitals in Kinshasa. He established the Medical Clinic with the intention of providing medical services to a neighborhood without medical services. The clinic provides a good opportunity and setting for professional relationships, teleconferencing, and the development of an Institute for Fistula Repairs.

Conclusion

What did we hear?

- 1. Gratitude*** – *We heard many comments related to people's gratitude for our visit. Taking people to visit the country in general and for specific projects was seen as a positive thing. Many times it was observed that Congo needs friends who not only take back information about what is going on in the country but who will also defend the cause of the Congolese.*
- 2. From Being Forgotten to Being Ignored*** – *There was still a strong feeling that, even if more news is being shared around the world about the situation in the country, the countries that might have influence to change the course of things in Congo are still ignoring the true desires of the Congolese people.*
- 3. Challenge to the Chinese Proverb*** – *We heard many times a call to assist the Congolese people with the urgent needs and invite especially business people to invest in the country which will create jobs and stability for many. We also heard that humanitarian work alone will not provide sustainable development. We heard a strong call to also challenge or speak to the powers that might consider themselves as the controllers of the pond where Congolese people are expected to learn how to fish. The majority of people in Eastern Congo and those in the business community had one message for us: "Please assist us in getting rid of those who are raping us, our*

sisters, our land and our natural resources. We know the Americans who are supporting our neighbors can do it if they want to because we know the American government is making it possible for our neighbors to hurt us.”

- 4. **Affirmation of Henri Nouwen Challenge** – “We have hardly thought through the immense implications of the mystery of the incarnation. Where is God? God is where we are weak, vulnerable, small, and dependant. God is where the poor are, the hungry, the handicapped, the mentally ill, the elderly, the powerless. How can we come to know God when our focus is elsewhere, on success, influence, and power? Our faithfulness will depend on our willingness to go where there is brokenness, loneliness, and human need.”*

I am very thankful to all the people who traveled with me and the sense of camaraderie that developed among the team members. It was sad that Gail, Kim, and Bruno could not make it but we hope that at least Gail and Kim will still have the chance to travel to Eastern Congo within the next two months to share their professional expertise with their colleagues in Eastern Congo.

Many good things are happening in Congo and it is exciting for Mama Makeka House of Hope to be in the midst of it. We look forward to participating in projects and programs that make sense and have long lasting impact for the Congolese people. We are also looking forward to inviting more people to join us in visiting our different projects in Congo in the years to come. In June we hope to take a team from Northpark Community Church and Seattle Queen Ann United Methodist Church to visit and participate in projects in Kajiji and Walungu.

We also hope to accompany a team of business men and women from British Columbia with interest in investing in business in Congo. Furthermore, we are also working with a gentleman who developed a solar flashlight about the possibility of manufacturing it in Kinshasa. In the meantime he has approved Mama Makeka House of Hope as one of its partners. While in Congo, he wrote to inform me that he had added MMH Hope to their website and we would receive a flashlight for each one purchased in MMH Hope name. He will also send \$1 to MMH Hope for each flashlight purchased in North America in MMH Hope’s name. See <http://www.bogolight.com> for more information and how you can participate.

The next trip to Congo is planned for June to July 2008.

Appendix 1

Political and Socio-Economic Environment

It was good to go back to Congo around the same time each year which allowed me to see changes that are taking place in the country, small though they might be. This year gave me an opportunity to connect with many more politicians and government leaders on the national and provincial level, especially in Eastern Congo, than in the past. The political, economic, and security picture I will be painting is based on several public and private encounters with these leaders and several people involved in Civil Society activities during our time in Kinshasa and Eastern Congo.

1. ***Economic Environment*** - *I noticed the stability of the Congolese Franc for the past two to three years. The currency has remained between 520 to 530 Francs to one US dollar. Such stability is allowing people involved in small businesses to buy and sell goods for which they need hard currency. Stores and the open markets are full of local and manufactured goods and the only issue is the buying power for many people who are still not well paid or the little they make is not paid regularly.*

In spite of the security issues in Eastern Congo, there seems to be an increase in agricultural production from the region. I noticed more fruits, vegetables, and cheese from Eastern Congo on the Kinshasa markets than there used to be in the 1990's when we lived in Kinshasa. It will not take very long for the Eastern part of the country to become once again an agricultural and economic power once the security issues are dealt with (see the section on security). Currently, most of the income from natural resources is taken advantage of by non- Congolese people leaving the local people among the poorest in the world.

2. ***Security and People Movement*** – *The situation is tense in a small number of villages in North Kivu due to one dissident Army General still being backed by Rwanda. We did not have any reason to fear while traveling in Kinshasa or South Kivu. Many people still live in fear in the Walungu region because of the Hutu militia groups roaming in the mountains and coming down to raid villages and kidnap and rape women. We met with 153 of these women and many of them are now living in the city of Walungu as Internally Displaced People.*

We arrived in Eastern Congo while more than 1,000 people were meeting to discuss peace and development in Eastern Congo. The conference was considered by some as one step towards finding a solution to sustainable peace for the region. All the armed groups and representatives of the Civil Society were present at this conference. Although it was a two provincial conference, there was a strong representation of the international community – UN, European Union, African Union, US State Department, etc. Not everyone had a positive outlook at this conference. Some people took it as another way of allowing the dissident general and militia teams to regroup and organize other attacks with the hope of annexing Eastern Congo to Rwanda. What upset many of them was the declaration made at the end of the conference recommending amnesty for leaders of militia groups and many of those who have caused so

many of the atrocities and pain in the civilian population in the region. When we left Bukavu, I talked with several conference participants who had to leave Goma before the signing of the official documents. They feared being stoned when they returned back home because people in Bukavu felt that participants had compromised one the initial objectives of the conference.

3. ***New Discoveries** - We arrived in Congo when a report was just released about the discovery of oil throughout the whole Congo basin. The report indicates the presence of oil in almost every province of the country. I actually wondered if this was a blessing or another curse for Congo. There is already an economic cold war going on because of the Chinese investment in Congo that leads me to believe that the Congolese are bound to suffer again because of all the old and new vultures wanting the Congolese natural resources but not caring for the Congolese people themselves.*
4. ***The Chinese Connection** – Many conversations in Kinshasa and Eastern Congo revolved around the current economic and development agreement signed between the Congolese government and China. It was interesting to note that the reaction or response to Chinese involvement in the Congo depended upon whether you were Congolese or European or North American. North Americans and Europeans tended to raise the human rights issues in relationship to China and almost all the Congolese we talked to saw the Chinese involvement in Congo as good news and marking a new chapter in the country's development process. Congolese, including those in government, parliament, or senate could not understand what they considered double standards by Europeans and North Americans. They wondered why Europeans and North Americans were concerned when their own countries are borrowing money from China and their stores are filled with Chinese goods. Several government leaders with whom I talked asked me if Western leaders and their citizens, especially those working with International non-governmental organizations have evaluated their own involvement and contribution to the exploitation of Congo and its population during the past 80 years.*

The following is what I think best summarizes the Chinese Connection as I found it in Congo:

The massive deal that China signed with the Democratic Republic of Congo last year is not the "second colonisation" that some Europeans allege it is. The agreement appears, in fact, a promising way to kick-start an economy. The agreement on developing infrastructure through "resource-backed finance" certainly gives China a lot of influence in a country where Europeans are used to dealing the cards. European countries now look with a certain envy at what China has achieved. President Joseph Kabila's political future depends on this Sino-Congolese deal. And, with that, at least a part of the economic future of Congo itself.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has been endowed with tremendous natural resources, but 40 years of mismanagement have brought the country down. The DRC is now one of the poorest countries on earth - even the most basic of infrastructure has succumbed to four decades of neglect. The announcement in September 2007 that China would take on big infrastructure projects in the DRC, to be paid for with Congo's immense copper and cobalt

reserves, inevitably attracted a lot of attention. But it created also a lot of suspicion: what exactly were the Chinese up to?

The Chinese companies will, for one thing, start work on infrastructural projects in 2008 more or less along the lines of the five priorities Kabila has set: water, electricity, education, health, and transport. These works will cost more than 9 billion dollars. That is a lot of money, considering that the 2007 government budget was a mere 1.3 billion dollars, most of which was needed just to pay the salaries of government staff. So how will the DRC pay off these Chinese loans?

The basic idea is that Congolese and Chinese state owned enterprises (SOEs) set up a joint venture, Socomin. This mining company will invest 3 billion dollars in mainly new mining areas. The profits of Socomin will be used to repay these mining investments and the investments in the big infrastructural works. Broad agreement was reached in September last year. It was then fine-tuned through two months of negotiations in Beijing in November and December. "It took a long time, that's for sure," says French-born Paul Fortin, CEO of Gecamines, the Congolese state-owned mining company. "We had to agree on an economic model that stipulates how the Chinese investments will be repaid with the revenue of Socomin. Apart from that, these were normal business negotiations comparable to those I did for the many partnerships of Gecamines with private companies. - from "Democratic Republic of Congo: China Outdoes Europeans" by John Vandaele, Brussels"

For those not familiar with the agreement, John Vandaeles summarizes it as follows:

- *The main agreement was concluded between the Congolese state and three large Chinese state owned enterprises, including China Eximbank which has for years extended large loans to Chinese contractors. The agreement stipulates that these two parties should form a joint venture Socomin (Societe Congolaise Miniere) incorporated under Congolese law.*
- *In all, 32 percent of that company's shares are held by the large publicly owned mining company of Katanga province, Gecamines, and 68 percent by the Chinese. Much of the extraction will be from new mines. Nothing is taken away from existing mines, except from a part of Katanga Mining Ltd. owned by the Belgian George Forrest, which will be duly reimbursed.*
- *In a first phase, Socomin's revenues will be used to repay mining investments of 3 billion dollars. Gecamines is also given a correcting loan of 100 million dollars, with which the back pay of foreign and Congolese ex-employees, among others, can be paid.*
- *In a second phase, 66 percent of the net profit will go towards paying off the loans that the Chinese will, by then, have used to pay for the infrastructural works. The other 34 percent*

is distributed among the shareholders. During those two phases, the joint venture is exempted from all taxation.

- This is followed by a 9-billion dollar list of infrastructural works which two large Chinese publicly owned enterprises will build between them. Sinohydro, a large state-owned company that has furnished the backbone of Chinese hydraulic engineering works and hydroelectric power stations, will build high-voltage power lines and power plants. The company will also repair and expand water supply, and construct 49 distribution centres supplying potable water, 31 hospitals each with 150 beds, 145 health centres each with 50 beds, four large universities, the parliament building, and 20,000 council houses or flats.*
- The China Railway Engineering Company (CREC) is a state-owned company that laid two-thirds of the Chinese rail network (no less than 400,000 km), and has 280,000 employees. CREC is tasked with renovating the railway between the ports of Muambe, Matadi and Kinshasa, the railway between Kinshasa, Ilebo, Lubumbashi and Kasumbalesa, and between Lubumbashi, Kindu, Kalemie and the north-east of Congo. In and around Kinshasa, 250 km of roads will be built, including an orbital motorway round the city. Elsewhere too, many new roads are planned. - In addition, an agreement exists between the Congolese government and the private company Shanghai Pengxin Group Ltd. to develop public infrastructure with "project funding covered by revenue from natural resources." Shanghai Pengxin has to mobilise 1 billion dollars, 850 million dollars of which is for the mining and infrastructural works and 150 million dollars as budgetary assistance to the government. It is stipulated in the agreement that the mining has to be on a sufficiently large scale to repay that amount.*

5. *International Monetary Institutions: Hidden Burden for Congolese People –*
Since the late '80's and early '90's, the international monetary institutions required all implementation of development or institutional programs to go through International Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Those in government are wondering why they still need to continue to accumulate and pay for debts for expenses which had to do with these international NGO's administrative overhead. One former minister of social affairs shared about how funds from the World Bank had to be implemented by the International NGO that used more than 60% for their international staff and administration. He assessed less than 30% to be actually used for the intended purpose and yet the Congolese government had the obligation to reimburse 100% of the loan plus the interest rate. "Is that the legacy they want us to leave to our children?" he asked.

6. *Congolese Perception of International NGO: Maintain a Chronic Emergency Status –*
You cannot go anywhere in major cities in Congo without seeing half a dozen vehicles belonging to International NGO's. Many of them known for emergency relief are now doing structural work across the country. It does not take very long as you visit with many of them to realize that the language of local capacity building or long term strategic planning is actually lip service. Involvement of NGO's in Congo, including certain structures of the UN, are now being

perceived as job creation for the international community rather than promoting peace and economic stability in the country. I sensed a certain level resentment toward international NGOs. The question was often asked as to why many UN workers had to bring secretaries and in some cases even cooks or housekeepers from their countries of origin?

A couple members of the parliament and one senator asked me if I knew a single country that had developed economically because of the work of NGOs. I actually couldn't, and still cannot, think of a single one. What I heard was that NGO's might have their room but they should not take the place of government structures as has become the case in Congo. I heard government leaders, members of the civil society, parliament and senate calling for assistance to strengthen government institutions and the middle social structures rather than having NGOs use the fate of the Congolese people for their own survival to the point of always painting dark pictures of the country in order to assure financial contributions from the international community. "I remember the Peace Corps volunteers and many others from the churches in Europe and North America. They were the true volunteers because you could find them everywhere in the country but they did not come to take jobs from the Congolese then expect Congolese people to pay for it later," one member of the national parliament once observed during our conversation.

Someone asked me in Bukavu if Mama Makeka House of Hope did not have a hidden agenda like many other international NGOs in the region. When I asked what the person meant, he just said, "Many of these international NGO's are really lions in sheep skin." He went on to explain how some of them are full of people negotiating their own mining contracts and others facilitating the exploitation of natural resources in the name of humanitarian assistance. As painful as it felt for a few seconds for our noble intentions to be suspected, it also reminded me that no one should be exempt from microscopic scrutiny or suspicion by the local people.

- 7. Perception of the Role of US Citizens and their Government in Regards to Security and Future of DR. Congo – I don't recall speaking to anyone who did not raise the issue of the US' role in promoting peace, security, and stability in Congo. Be it a perception or a reality, the Congolese people believe that the US government holds a key for peace and security in Congo and the Great Lake Region. They were not naïve in thinking about wanting the US to fight on behalf of the Congolese people. The example of Iraq was cited sometimes as the reason for not wanting too much direct US government involvement in Congolese affairs. The issues they raised had to do with what they considered a double standard and mixed messages in the US policy for the Great Lake Region. The big concern is the US military support being provided to Rwanda and Uganda knowing very well that these two countries are responsible for continued instability and the insecurity in Eastern Congo.*

Those in government, parliament and senate that I had the chance to visit with face to face or by telephone insisted on reminding the American people not to undermine the misery caused to the Congolese people because of the US government policies and actions. One of them even asked the following question: "We provided Americans with the raw material they needed to make bombs used to finish the Second World War; we gave them space in Central Africa in the so called war

against communism and what have we received from the US government? What is it that our neighbors have that we cannot provide the American people and their government? Aren't the natural resources they are getting from our neighbors from our soil?"

Soon after my return to California, President Bush traveled to Africa. As he left Washington, I wonder if Congo was on his radar screen if, for no other reason, but at least to sympathize with the Congolese people in light of the fact that more than 5 million have died in Congo since 1997. Instead, he visited Rwanda with less than a million dead and he promised to assist them in developing a strong military system. Two analysts from Washington picked up on the Congo issues in light of President Bush visit and support of Rwanda. Their reflection echoes what I heard in Congo.

The US "war on terror" exported to Rwanda: a threat to peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo by Bahati Ntama Jacques Policy Analyst and Beth Tuckey Associate Director of Program Development and Policy, Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in Washington, DC.

There is a common flaw in US foreign policy. In giving aid to foreign nations, the United States prioritizes its own foreign policy goals over any standards of good governance. Because this system of support ignores the realities on the ground, it ultimately backfires, undermining US long term interests and fueling instability, conflict, and violations of core human rights standards. Nowhere is this more true than in Africa. Today, President Bush supports corrupt, illegitimate regimes that will either cooperate in the Global War on Terror, provide US companies access to much sought-after natural resources, or both. If history is any indication, this infusion of wealth and military training for such self-interested gains is likely to be disastrous for the people of Africa.

A particularly good example of this is Rwanda – a country that has abused its neighboring people in the Democratic Republic of Congo with support from the United States government. President Paul Kagame will host President Bush this week. Will the leader of the most powerful country in the world have the courage to discuss Rwanda's negative role in peace and economic development in DRC? Will he castigate Rwandan President Kagame for not providing the political space for Hutus to return to Rwanda? Likely, no. He will announce US support for peace in Congo while simultaneously pushing forward a foreign policy that favors only America's narrow interests.

*From 1996-2003, the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo suffered a great deal from two wars that pitted Rwanda and its allies against the Congo. The Congolese loss was other people's gain. According to Global Policy Forum's *Tito Dragon in DR Congo: Dirt Above Ground, Precious Metal Below*, "it was the attempt to control coltan mines that was the principal, if not the only, motivation behind the US-backed 1998 occupation of part of DRC territory by Rwanda and Uganda." In fact, in 2004, after a three-year investigation, a UN Panel of Experts implicated three major US companies for fueling war in DRC by*

collaborating with rebel groups trafficking coltan. United States assistance to Rwanda continues today largely due to Kagame's willingness to be engaged in the US War on Terror; and again, the people of DRC lose.

Though he publicly denies any direct involvement, most officials agree that President Kagame funds renegade General Laurent Nkunda's militia in DRC – a militia whose primary purpose appears to be keeping Hutu rebels away from the Rwandan border. A UN report accuses Nkunda's Tutsi faction of some of the worst human rights abuses of any rebel group currently operating in the eastern region. Though Kagame has undoubtedly brought strong economic development to the small great lakes nation, he has failed to adequately deal with the legacy of the 1994 genocide – the strained relationship between Hutus and Tutsis.

Bush knows that Rwanda's involvement in the armed conflict in DRC delays peace in eastern Congo, but he continues to authorize military aid to Rwanda. In 2007, the United States armed and trained Rwandan soldiers with \$7.2 million from the US defense program Africa Contingent Operations Training Assistance (ACOTA) and \$260,000 from the International Military and Education (IMET) program. At the same time, the US is involved in facilitating peace talks between Rwanda and DRC and the various rebel groups operating in eastern Congo. Not only does arming Rwanda contradict the peace process, but it also delays the recovery of Rwanda from its 1994 genocide.

During the Cold War, the US provided military aid to African countries to counter communism. Many of those countries – Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, and DRC – have now become hotspots of violence and economic failure in Africa. It is no surprise that lending arms and financial support to corrupt dictators and human rights abusers contributes to destabilization, but still the US government has yet to learn its lesson. Today, the rationale for providing military aid to countries like Rwanda is to counter terrorism; likely, the methods and outcomes will be largely the same as they were in the 1980's.

The Department of Defense argues that by training and equipping African military forces, it will bring greater stability and legitimacy to African governments. The case for professionalizing militaries was also made during the Cold War and it was a policy that ultimately failed. It should not be used again today to justify the self-interests of the United States.

This week, President Bush has the opportunity to encourage African governments to engage peacefully and democratically with their people and with each other, but only if the Administration's actions are seen as legitimate by African nations. Most countries have voiced a vehement 'no' to the creation and implementation of a new US military command for Africa (AFRICOM) and other US military activities on the continent. For the sake of countries like DRC, Mr. Bush should begin with a drawing back of his own defense policy in Africa

