

# PAX Policy Brief | 5 November 2019

## Insecurity without Borders

### Resolving Security challenges in northeastern DR Congo through local and regional approaches

The recent deterioration of the security and human rights situation in the northeastern part of the DR Congo originates in the existence of various armed groups and individuals with a strong volatile and cross-border character and the lack of rule of law and state presence in this area.

#### Lord's Resistance Army

A permanent factor of insecurity is the fragmented Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) that nowadays operates in small groups in the geographical triangle of Dungu (Province of Haut Uele), Ango (Province of Bas Uele) and Zemio (southern province of CAR). This Ugandan rebel group was founded in 1996 and committed severe atrocities against the civil population in Uganda and South Sudan, for which the ICC issued five arrest warrants in 2005. To date, just one case has been brought to trial and the leader of the LRA 'Joseph Kony' is still in command. Due to the Juba peace talks that were initiated between the Ugandan government and the rebel group in July 2006, the LRA violence stopped in Uganda.



*Local children in a theatre play on the LRA violence in Faradje*

*Photographer: Cédric Gerbehaye*

The first group of 300 LRA combatants entered the DR Congo in September 2005, reportedly authorized by the Congolese central government. A few months later the reunited LRA groups installed their base camp in Parc de la Garamba. When it became clear in 2008 that the peace process had failed, the Congolese government authorized the armed forces of Uganda 'the UPDF' to bomb the LRA base camp. The LRA started a retaliatory offensive against the local communities in December 2008, to be known as the Christmas Massacres of Faradje (Haut Uele). During the first half year of 2019, they continued their atrocities through the so-called 'Trail of Death' that led through a chain of communities towards Ango (Bas Uele).

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In the province of Haut Uele, at least 1800 civilians were killed by the LRA and 900 children were abducted (registered by PAX and partner organisations until now). According to testimonies of former combatants that were interviewed by PAX, the order for the bloodshed came directly from upper commander Joseph Kony. The violence over the past 10 years has left the people with deep scars. A part of these victims has not been able to return to their villages of origin or to their fields and an estimate of 8.000-10.000 victims of violence still suffer from the traumatic events. Additionally, the social cohesion in the communities is heavily affected by the disturbed relationship between the victims of violence and the LRA defectors who have returned to their villages.



2018 Commemoration of LRA violence in Faradje

Photographer: Cédric Gerbehaye

From 2010 onwards, the LRA dispersed into much smaller and volatile groups in the border region of DR Congo and the CAR. The number and impact of their atrocities have scaled down, but the armed groups still cause permanent insecurity in this region. The province of Bas Uele was plagued by a number of (mass) abductions during the period August-November 2018. In view of this situation, the local authority of Ango pleaded for a strengthening of the security forces in the area. This turned out to be in vain. LRA activity flared up in Haute Uele in January of this year. A relatively large number of well-armed LRA men looted civilians in several villages in the territories of Dungu and Niangara and they reportedly ambushed a convoy of the MONUSCO. Over the last year international monitoring mechanisms registered 248 abductions, 97 attacks and 8 killings by the LRA in the geographical triangle.

Traditionally the LRA generated income through looting, poaching and especially the trade of ivory. Nowadays their ivory trade is waning since the elephants in the DRC have become rarer and the one's left are better protected. Nevertheless, the latest incidents in 2019 indicate that the LRA members were well-armed and equipped. According to local sources, they were able to diversify their sources of revenue and added the extorting of artisanal miners and gold trade. For instance, the gold mining area of Derbisaka (close to Zemio and Rafaï) is allegedly controlled by the LRA. In the CAR, the LRA has reportedly worked as mercenaries in ad hoc assignments for the Seleka. The LRA has the strategic advantage to be able to operate in small and mobile groups in severe conditions in isolated areas.

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### Peuhl - Mbororo

The LRA activities are closely intertwined with the presence of other foreign groups, the most evident one being the Peuhl, colloquially referred to as Mbororo. These traditionally nomadic cattle-herders and traders originate from countries such as Chad, Cameroun, CAR and Sudan and settled in the region since the 2000s. They live mainly between the Bonde and Gurba rivers in the territories of Niangara, Dungu (Haut Uele) and Ango (Bas Uele). The Mbororo includes pacific actors as well as armed elements. According to local sources, “an estimate of 80% of the local Mbororo groups would be armed with blade weapons and firearms.” A study by PAX conducted in 2007 estimated that the Mbororo roughly consisted of 15.000 to 20.000 persons. The current exact number of Mbororo in the area is not known as a planned official identification mission to hold a census among the Mbororo in July 2018 was eventually not realized due to a lack of financial and logistic means.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is clear that their number is on the rise. According to some local sources there are currently 80.000 Mbororo in the whole northern area.<sup>2</sup>

There are numerous accounts of the complex and divers links between the LRA and the Mbororo. Over the last year, the communities reportedly observed small well-equipped LRA groups accompanied by Mbororo. Through interviews with LRA defectors, PAX established that some elements of the Mbororo provide services to the LRA (food, communication material) and that the LRA operates as scouts for the Mbororo. Certain aspects of this cooperation seem to be on the basis of shared interests. For example, the Oudas, a subgroup of the Mbororo originally from Chad, would occasionally collaborate with the LRA regarding matters of illegal trade and the transport of goods. On the other hand, there have been reports of extortion and of the kidnapping of children of Mbororo by the LRA.

The Mbororo and the local communities in northern Congo have a troubled relationship. According to the complaints of the local population, traditional chiefs and church leaders, the uncontrolled arrival of Mbororo has led to damages to their fields, violent incidents, water pollution and destruction of the ecosystem.<sup>3</sup> In at least four chiefdoms of Haut Uele, the local population holds the opinion that the influx of Mbororo has deprived them of the effective control over their traditional land and practically forces them to live in enclaves. In Dungu for example, about 30.000 Mbororo took over three quarters of the Malingindo chiefdom that covers 10,800 km<sup>2</sup>, while forcing the majority of the 20.000 residents to live in the remaining part. In Niangara, the Chiefdom of Maziga, with a surface area of 2200 km<sup>2</sup>, has almost been entirely taken over by the Mbororo. The chiefdoms of Wando and of Ndolomo face the same challenges. In various occasions, local community members have attacked Mbororo members and killed a part of their cattle.

<sup>1</sup> «Haut Uele: La délégation chargée d'identification des Mbororo est dépourvue des moyens à Dungu», July 29, 2018 ; Radio Okapi, [https://www.radiookapi.net/2018/07/29/actualite/securite/haut-uele-la-delegation-chagee-d-identification-des-mbororo-est](https://www.radiookapi.net/2018/07/29/actualite/securite/haut-uele-la-delegation-chargee-d-identification-des-mbororo-est).

<sup>2</sup> This number could not be verified.

<sup>3</sup> «RDC: les Mbororo se sont coalisés aux rebelles LRA au Haut Uélé », June 20, 2014 ; Radio Okapi, <https://www.radiookapi.net/actualite/2014/06/20/rdc-les-mbororo-se-sont-coalisés-aux-rebelles-lra-au-haut-uele>.

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The national security force ‘FARDC’ has a military basis in Dungu but is unable to guarantee security or effective border control in this vast area. Monusco has closed its Dungu base in 2019. According to local leaders, the MONUSCO underlines the fact that they consider the Mbororo merely as climate refugees and stresses the need for peaceful coexistence between the original population and the recent Mbororo migrants.<sup>4</sup> As far as the provincial and national authorities are concerned, so far they have not been willing to engage actively in a result-oriented dialogue with Mbororo leaders, traditional chiefs and community representatives. The Bishop of Isiro-Niangara denounced publicly “the guilty silence” of the authorities on the tensions that have arisen on the issue.



*Ex-combatant of the LRA*  
Photographer: Cédric Gerbehaye

### Seleka – Anti Balaka

The southwestern part of the CAR has seen a strong proliferation of armed groups that operate in a highly unstable environment. It concerns for example the Muslim rebels of the Seleka umbrella group that seized power in 2013 and the band of mostly Christian militias, called the anti-Balaka, that seek to counter the Seleka. In 2016, this fight gave rise to new armed groups, often small in size, including ex-Seleka factions. The subdivisions of the Seleka, such as General Ali Darass and General Nourredine, recruit members and defectors of the LRA and supply them with food and equipment. Occasionally members of those armed groups cross the border with the DR Congo. Since the beginning of the year, rebel groups of the Anti-Balaka invaded Congolese territory several times during which 50 Congolese citizens were killed.

<sup>4</sup> We have tried to check this statement with the Monusco offices in Goma and Bunia, but have not received an (clear) answer. The dialogue with Monusco on the matter has been continued in Kinshasa.

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### Recent developments and opportunities

Over the last few weeks the spill over from the conflict in the CAR to the DR Congo intensified. During the month of September, the local population of Dungu (Haut Uele) reported the presence of the *Union for Peace in the Central African Republic* (UPC), a subdivision of the Central African armed group Seleka, in their territory. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, General Ali Darrassa of the Central African rebel group UPC informed MUNISCA in a public letter of their decision to deploy the Mbororo in the border area near Obo and South Sudan.<sup>5</sup> The day after the publication of the UPC letter, seven persons were looted in Malingindo (Dungu – Haut Uele) by well-armed Mbororo. On November the 5<sup>th</sup> a local farmer was shot with an arrow when he complained about the Mbororo cattle that had ravaged his crops.

In view of these concerning developments, it can be perceived as a positive sign that the prominent leader of the Mbororo recently indicated that a part of the groups is open to dialogue on the return to their home countries. An important condition for such a possible return is the engagement of the governments of their countries of origin in a regional dialogue on the issue. PAX received a written statement that expresses this willingness for dialogue. Partner organization APRU and PAX have presented their specific recommendations to the central government of the DR Congo and will continue the dialogue with authorities on the follow up.

<sup>5</sup> No 0151/ UPC / DIR.MIL / SG. 2019 du Général Ali Darrassa.

## Recommendations

We urge the international community to:

- ◆ Perceive the conflicts and violence by the different groups as an intertwined cross-border phenomenon that needs to be addressed with a coherent and regional approach. The AU, MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNOCA could play an active role in such a process.
- ◆ Engage in a political dialogue with the governments of the DRC and CAR and the governments of the home countries of the Mbororo and LRA to find a sustainable solution for the conflicts in the border region. This includes the possibility to start a dialogue on the partial return of Mbororo to their home countries.
- ◆ Promote and support a coherent program in the DR Congo to register, disarm and concentrate the Mbororo temporarily in a vast area, pending the results of a regional dialogue.
- ◆ Urge the governments of the DRC and CAR to implement effective border control mechanisms, including state procedure regarding the arrival of new groups of nomadic cattle herders, armed elements and rebel groups.
- ◆ To assess the viability of a political and diplomatic dialogue with the new government of Sudan regarding the support of the former government and state security providers to LRA commander Joseph Kony.

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### PAX's intervention Strategies to promote human security in Northeastern Congo

- ✓ Strengthening community resilience regarding security threats and human rights challenges posed by LRA competence, violent elements of Mbororo groups and cross border rebel groups such as the UPC and occasionally state security providers.
- ✓ Promotion of defection of LRA combatants and kidnapped civilians through context sensible interventions and the coordination with religious leaders, traditional authorities and civil society organisations in the border region of the DRC, CAR and Uganda.
- ✓ Reintegration of defectors of the LRA through the support and guidance of local chiefs and female leaders of the victims committees.
- ✓ Conflict mediation and resolution between antagonist parties, including conflicts between communities and local actors such as mining companies, Mbororo groups, authorities and national reserves;
- ✓ Lobby and advocacy to promote a regional dialogue to come to a sustainable solution for the cross- border insecurity and the migration.
- ✓ Promotion of Justice and Reparation through evidence-based truth finding research, including the responsibilities of armed actors, national governments, local authorities, politicians, civic leaders and the international communities.
- ✓ Reconstruction of the social cohesion in the communities through inclusive remembrance and community based reconciliation defectors and victims. This strategy is implemented by the victims committees.

### PAX in the DR Congo

PAX (formerly known as Pax Christi) is a leading Dutch peace movement with a global reach. Our guiding principles are solidarity and human dignity, focussed on bringing about tangible change for the unarmed civil population, who seek to survive in situations of insecurity, conflict or impunity. We started in 2003 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and carried out peace initiatives during the violent years of the civil war in Ituri, Haut Uele and Tshopo.

This project is a continuation of PAX's program in support of the victims of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) that started with our involvement in the (Juba) peace talks between the LRA and the Ugandan government, and our support to the victims of the LRA massacres in the DRC in 2008. The current program seeks to support local communities and victims of violence in Haut and Bas Uele in their endeavours to improve the present security situation and to deal with the consequences of the waves of violence from the past.