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## State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 - Democratic Republic of Congo

### Ongoing conflict in the east

Conflict continued during 2011, fuelled by competition for land and resources, and often manipulated by identity-based politics. A reported 1.7 million people were displaced, the majority from the troubled North and South Kivu regions. Continued insecurity contributed to a slowdown in the rate of return in 2011; the situation for those who did dare to return home remained difficult, due in part to land tenure issues. While all returnees face a precarious situation, Batwa or Bambuti have particular problems, reporting lack of access to targeted support.

In North Kivu, the ethnic Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) continued to fight rival militias and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC); all sides have been accused of abuses against the civilian population. But minorities, including Batwa or Bambuti, are particularly vulnerable to attack. In one such incident, soldiers of the FARDC were implicated in mass rapes in the villages of Bushani and Kalambahiro on 1 January 2011.

One person was arrested and charged in connection with mass rapes by armed groups in July and August 2010 in Walikale (see case study), where the army had refused to deploy after a dispute over control of local mining.

In South Kivu, armed groups, as well as the army itself, continued to attack civilians and NGOs. Impunity contributed to all types of violence against civilians, including incidents of sexual violence affecting both women and men of diverse ethnic groups.

Despite the February convictions in court of eight FARDC soldiers and their commanding officer for mass rapes carried out in Fizi on 1 January 2011, soldiers defecting from the same army unit in June carried out another series of mass rapes in nearby villages.

Attacks on civilians across ethnic groups by the LRA intensified in the north-eastern Orientale province in the first half of 2011. Tens of thousands were displaced. FARDC soldiers in the area were accused of violations, including against the Mbororo, semi-nomadic Islamic pastoralists.

### **Violence around parliamentary and presidential elections**

Flawed presidential elections in November 2011 led to the re-inauguration of incumbent Joseph Kabila. Electoral violence, ranging from widespread violations by state security forces against opposition candidates and activists, to violence between supporters of different political parties, began early in the year. It carried on through the presidential and parliamentary campaign to polling day and subsequent conflict over results.

Targeted killings and 'disappearances' of candidates and supporters were reported, as well as shootings and arrests of demonstrators. Journalists and human rights defenders were attacked, detained or threatened. At times, candidates or their supporters used apparent ethnic hate speech to incite violence against opponents, despite an agreed code of conduct for political parties. Opposition sympathizers and leaders, such as Kabila's rival for the presidency Etienne Tshisekedi, a Kasaian of Luba origin, were reported to be the most frequent targets.

### **Natural resources**

The DRC is rich in minerals (see case study), forest products and energy sources. Many of the country's indigenous Batwa or Bambuti peoples depend in part on forest hunting and gathering, and have seen their livelihoods threatened by deforestation. The EU is the DRC's largest market for timber. To combat illegal logging, the DRC is negotiating a Voluntary Partnership Agreement under the EU FLEGT scheme. The FLEGT framework includes a specific project to ensure that civil society organizations, including indigenous peoples' organizations, are fully aware of and encouraged to be involved in the negotiation process. The DRC government has also completed a Readiness Preparation Plan under the UN-REDD (UN Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) initiative, with several pilot forestry projects under way.

As in other countries in the region, 2011 saw new agreements with international investors to significantly expand land under cultivation. One such deal, facilitated by the governor of Katanga province in what he described as an effort to increase food security and reduce the area's dependency on mining, opened up 14 million hectares of land to foreign development.