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Query response on DR Kongo: Province of Ituri and capital Bunia: Security situation [a-11748-1]

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Please read in full all documents referred to.

Non-English language information is summarised in English. Original language quotations are provided for reference in the document or upon request.

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Ituri province

In a report of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to the UN Security Council from September 2021 (covering developments between 19 June and 17 September 2021), the security situation in Ituri province is described in the following terms:

"III. Security situation

A. Ituri Province

11. Despite the state of siege, the security situation in Ituri deteriorated, in particular in Djugu and Irumu territories, owing to armed group activity, causing population displacement. The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) were reinforced, which enabled the launch of offensive military operations in southern Irumu territory on 6 July, and in eastern Djugu territory on 29 July. From 19 June to 6 September, 268 civilians, including at least 37 women and 13 children, were killed, and 64 civilians, including at least six women and three children, were injured.

12. In Djugu and Mahagi territories, Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO) factions continued to attack FARDC positions and civilians. From 19 June to

6 September, CODECO factions killed 96 civilians, including at least 16 women and 6 children. Additionally, CODECO looted and damaged property, causing the displacement of civilians. At the beginning of August, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that 1.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) were present in Ituri.

13. In Irumu Territory, frequent ADF [Allied Democratic Forces, Forces démocratiques alliées] attacks constituted the most significant threat to civilians on both sides of the border between Ituri and North Kivu provinces. In particular, suspected ADF combatants carried out daily attacks targeting civilians in Banyali Tchabi and Bahema-Boga chieftaincies and near Tchabi between 20 and 25 June, on 26 and 27 July, and on 4 August. From 19 June to 6 September, 134 civilians, including at least 17 women and two children, were killed during ADF attacks, while at least 235 civilians were abducted. As at 6 September, at least 13,200 IDPs had left areas threatened by the ADF to Komanda, Bukiringi and Bogoro. Other IDPs, mainly from the Hutu community, assembled in a camp near a MONUSCO base in Tchabi. On 27 July, MONUSCO responded to an ADF attack against an FARDC position in Busio and evacuated four injured FARDC soldiers. On 29 July, MONUSCO held, then handed over to authorities, nine alleged ADF elements and transferred two children associated with the group to child protection actors.

14. Incidents involving the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI) and the Front patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo decreased compared to the previous report. From 19 June to 6 September, eight civilians, including at least one woman, were killed, and five men were injured as a result of such incidents. Nonetheless, in southern Irumu territory, the security situation and intercommunal tensions between the Hutu community and several other communities prompted FRPI to increase recruitment, while the disarmament and demobilization process of the group remained at a standstill." (UN Security Council, 17 September 2021, p. 3)

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF), which is the German authority responsible for conducting asylum procedures and protecting refugees, publishes regular updates on security developments in the form of briefing notes. In October 2021, the BAMF briefing notes contained the following information on the state of siege and activities of the Islamic fundamentalist group Allied Democratic Forces (Forces démocratiques alliées, ADF) in Ituri province:

"North Kivu and Ituri provinces: State of siege extended, ADF

For the ninth time in succession, the Congolese representative bodies have extended by a further 15 days the state of siege which has been in place since the beginning of May 2021 in the two provinces of Ituri and North Kivu. This means that the military and police forces continue to hold far-reaching powers of intervention. UNJHRO's [United Nations Joint Human Rights Office] director, Aziz Thioye, stated on 29.09.21 that, while the security situation in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri had improved since the state of siege came into force, the human rights situation remained bad. He said that serious rises in human rights violations were to be observed in the province's Irumu and Djugu territories in

particular, and that these were almost exclusively attributable to the Islamic fundamentalist group Forces démocratiques alliées (ADF). According to Aziz Thioye, the ADF is also exploiting long-standing and conflict-laden ethnic tensions and enmities among the various sections of the population. The Red Cross in Irumu territory has reported that an attack on the strategically important trading centre of Komanda, which is practically depopulated as a result of the various attacks of recent weeks, was once again attributable to the ADF. Eight civilians were reportedly killed, dozens were abducted and a number of houses were set on fire. People who had returned to Komanda in the wake of the recent attacks have fled once again in the face of the latest attack." (BAMF, 4 October 2021, p. 3)

Two weeks later, also in October 2021, BAMF published another set of briefing notes referring to internal displacements and the suspension of NGO activities due to the security situation in Ituri province:

"Ituri: New wave of internal displacements

Citing the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN radio station, Okapi, reported on 14.10.21 that more than 100,000 people had become internally displaced in the wake of the attacks by the Islamic fundamentalist group Forces démocratiques alliées (ADF) on the town of Komanda and the surrounding villages in the Irumu region of Ituri province between 23.09. and 01.10.21. At least 95 % of the resident population of Komanda and the surrounding area and 40,000 of the people who sought refuge in the region in 2020 have reportedly taken flight. According to OCHA, those who have fled lack food, water and healthcare in their places of refuge. Quoting local sources, Radio Okapi also stated that 70 % of the villages in the Irumu region are difficult to access, making it more difficult to provide humanitarian aid. Various NGOs have reportedly ceased operating in and around Komanda, on account of the security situation. According to press reports over recent weeks, various attacks by diverse armed groups in Ituri province have led to further cases of internal displacement. The clashes on 17.10.21 between the Congolese armed forces and the militia Coopérative de développement du Congo (CODECO) in the grouping of Peti, in the Walendu Djatsi sector of the Djugi territory alone apparently displaced more than 5,000 people. According to one resident, several villages have been virtually depopulated." (BAMF, 18 October 2021, p. 4)

The above cited report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) from October 2021 can be accessed in French via the following link:

- UN OCHA – UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: République démocratique du Congo - Note d'informations humanitaires : Aperçu de la situation dans le sud de l'Ituri, le 12 octobre 2021, 12 October 2021
https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2062071/20211012_note_speciale_sur_la_crise_humanaire_au_sud_ituri.pdf

On 30 October 2021, the independent international humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors Without Borders) declares that it suspends operations in Bambu health district in Ituri province following an armed attack on one of its vehicles:

"Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has suspended our activities in Bambu health district in Ituri province, northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, following an attack on one of our vehicles. [...] The convoy came under fire even though it was clearly showing the MSF name and emblem. MSF teams work according to the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, independence. Last June [2021], we expressed our outrage at the destruction and looting of the General Referral Hospital of Boga, which was the last remaining health facility in the district. MSF had coordinated its rehabilitation, with many years of effort going up in smoke in a matter of minutes. [...] 'Violence against civilians is a constant fact of life in this area and insecurity is growing, but still we need to try to reach people who need medical care,' says Manantsoa [MSF Head of Mission in Ituri]." (MSF, 30 October 2021)

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) notes the following on the security situation in Ituri province in two of its regional overviews on Africa in October 2021:

"In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Congolese government extended the 'State of Siege' operation amid increasing rebel activity in the provinces of Ituri and North-Kivu. In Ituri, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) carried out several deadly incursions against civilians in Beni and Irumu territories. Moreover, clashes were reported between the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) and multiple factions of the Cooperative for Development of Congo (CODECO) and Patriotic and Integrationist Force of Congo (FPIC), resulting in territorial gains for the FARDC in Djugu territory." (ACLED, 27 October 2021)

"In the Democratic Republic of Congo, heavy fighting was reported between the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) and rebels. In Ituri province, FARDC engaged in a series of deadly clashes with the Cooperative for Development of Congo (CODECO) and its allies. [...] Lastly, the Congolese government extended the 'State of Siege' operation in Ituri and North-Kivu provinces once again." (ACLED, 14 October 2021)

In September 2021, Human Rights Watch (HRW), an international non-governmental organisation with headquarters in New York City, reports on attacks on civilians since the government's imposition of martial law in May 2021 and refers to the killing of civilians in the village of Idohu, Ituri province, in the following terms:

"(Kinshasa) – Attacks on civilians by armed groups have continued in two conflict-ridden provinces of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo since the government imposed martial law in May 2021, Human Rights Watch said. Various armed groups, some unidentified, have killed at least 672 civilians, while Congolese security forces have killed 67 civilians, in Ituri and North Kivu provinces between the start of martial law on May 6 [2021] and September 10 [2021], according to data collected by the Kivu Security Tracker, a joint project of Human Rights Watch and the Congo Research Group.

A massacre in August, one of several mass killings that month, highlights ongoing insecurity in the region and the inadequate military response. On August 2 [2021], the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamist armed group led by Ugandans, allegedly killed at least 16 civilians, including 2 women, in the village of Idohu, Ituri province. A dozen Congolese army soldiers were in the village, and more were stationed in a military camp

nearby, but they did not prevent the attack. Other armed groups and some elements of Congo's national army have also been implicated in attacks in the area. 'The Congolese government may recognize the need for greater security in Ituri and North Kivu provinces, but imposing martial law hasn't accomplished that,' said Thomas Fessy, senior Congo researcher at Human Rights Watch. 'Despite the government's efforts to spin its actions as military successes, many people across eastern Congo still live in constant fear of the next massacre.' [...]

On August 4 [2021], alleged ADF fighters attacked Congolese army positions in the southern Tchabi area of Ituri, over 100 kilometers from Idohu, killing at least 10 soldiers and injuring others. The ADF regained control of several areas, including the village of Mapipa, UN sources said. Government forces had two weeks earlier announced that they had dislodged the ADF from the area. [...]

Following the ADF attack on Idohu, villagers fled to the town of Komanda, where camps were already housing thousands of internally displaced people. Many of the displaced there have sought shelter and safety within local communities, further taxing local schools, churches, and health centers. Some 2.8 million people or half the Ituri population are severely food insecure, according to the UN." (HRW, 15 September 2021)

In a press briefing from September 2021, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also refers to the security situation of civilians in Ituri province and the impact of the state of siege:

"UNHCR and its partners recorded more than 1,200 civilian deaths and 1,100 rapes this year in the two most affected provinces of North Kivu and Ituri. UNHCR has recorded 25,000 human rights abuses this year. In total, more than a million Congolese have been internally displaced in the east of the country in 2021. [...] On 6 September, an armed group reportedly raped 10 displaced women in Djugu Territory, Ituri province. UNHCR and partners took the women to the nearest hospital where they received psychosocial and medical support.

Following the state of siege, North Kivu and Ituri Provinces are now led by military governments, under which the national army has ramped up its operations and military tribunals have replaced civil courts. Some armed groups, seeing their territory shrink, have surrendered. Others counter military operations with reprisals against villages and individuals they perceive as supporting the government. Despite government efforts to reduce the abuses of armed groups, our teams continue to hear horrific accounts of sexual violence, extortion, and looting." (UNHCR, 10 September 2021)

In June 2021, the final report of the group of experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the UN Security Council (covering investigations conducted up to 23 April 2021) summarises the security situation in Ituri province as follows:

"In Ituri, the lack of progress towards a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for factions of the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO) contributed to the gradual deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in

Djugu territory. Attacks on FARDC [Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo] bases, the diversion of FARDC weaponry and cross-border trafficking resulted in CODECO factions' increased use of small arms and light weapons. Bon Temple combatants led by Tuwo committed acts of gang rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery in gold-rich Banyali-Kilo. The Group also documented killings of civilians, including children, by CODECO combatants. CODECO factions attacked and occupied gold mines and pillaged gold trading centres in Djugu territory, notably at Mongbwalu, a gold hub.

In Irumu territory, Force patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo (FPIC) conducted deadly attacks targeting the security forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and mainly non-Bira civilians and used children as combatants. Zaïre self-defence group continued to operate in Irumu and Djugu territories and were involved in armed clashes with CODECO factions and FPIC and in attacks against Bira and Lendu civilians. Zaïre mined gold and defended gold mines in both territories.

In parallel, members of the Democratic Republic of the Congo security forces deployed in Djugu and Irumu territories committed exactions, including conflict related sexual violence, in particular against the Lendu and Bira populations considered as affiliated to CODECO and FPIC, respectively.[...]

Fourteen months after the signing of the peace agreement between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Front de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI), the disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion and reintegration process was still stalled. FRPI continued to demand the fulfilment of the terms of the agreement, especially regarding amnesty, integration into FARDC and payment of allowances. Stakeholders continued their efforts to save the process." (UN Security Council, 10 June 2021, pp. 2-3)

The report of the UN Security Council from June 2021 provides further information on abuses by the individual factions to the conflict and can be accessed via the following link:

- UN Security Council: Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo [S/2021/560], 10 June 2021
https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2053905/S_2021_560_E.pdf

Compiling data collected by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ACCORD published a report in August 2021 that contains the following information on incidents in Ituri province in the first quarter of 2021:

"In Ituri, 131 incidents killing 377 people were reported. The following locations were among the affected: Adusa, Apende, Ariwara, Babonda, Belu, Biakato, Boyo, Buba, Budu, Buliria, Bunia, Bwakadi, Bwana-Sura, Chini ya kilima, Darlas, Djalasiga, Djugu, Iga Barriere, Irumu, Kabakaba, Kabarole, Kilo, Komanda, Kpandroma, Lengabo, Lenge, Libi, Linga, Lokwa, Lorobi, Mabanga, Maga, Mahagi, Mahala, Makeke, Mambasa, Mambelenga, Mambisa, Mapendo, Marabo, Mayalibo, Mbumbuli, Miala, Mobali, Mongbwalu, Musaba, Mwanga, Ndalya, Ndimu, Nia-Nia, Nioka, Nyangaray, Nzebi, Pabamga, Penie, Petsi, Rwampara, Soleniamba, Songolo, Tchani, Tchomia, Tshabi, Tshibi-Tshibi, Tsili, Zunguluka." (ACCORD, 12 August 2021, p. 5)

The following report on the situation in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu published in July 2021 by the Asylum Research Centre (ARC) includes a broad overview of insecurity in Ituri province from August 2019 to June 2021:

- ARC – Asylum Research Centre: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); The situation in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri - Update, 26 July 2021
https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2056656/DRC-COI-report_July-2021_ARC

For detailed information on the history of armed conflict in Ituri province as well as its main actors; the role of neighbouring countries and measures to restore peace see the following report published by the International Crisis group (ICG) in July 2020:

- ICG – International Crisis Group: DR Congo: Ending the Cycle of Violence in Ituri, 15 July 2020
<https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2033657/292-drc-ending-violence-in-ituri+%28%29.pdf>

Capital Bunia

In June 2021, the final report of the group of experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the UN Security Council (covering investigations conducted up to 23 April 2021) refers to armed activities by Force patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo (FPIC) in the vicinity of Bunia:

“Force patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo [...]

102. Force patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo (FPIC), of Bira-majority, continued to be one of the most active armed groups in Irumu territory, with increased armed activities against Democratic Republic of the Congo security forces and civilians in the vicinity of Bunia from January 2021. This exacerbated tensions among the Bunia population and triggered FARDC [Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo] operations” (UN Security Council, 10 June 2021, p. 24)

A report published in March 2021 by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to the UN Security Council on developments between 2 December 2020 to 18 March 2021 also refers to the security situation in Bunia town:

“III. Security situation

A. Ituri Province

13. In Ituri, the security situation deteriorated because of continued attacks on civilians and State security and defence forces by the Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO) and the Front patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo (FPIC) on the outskirts of Bunia town. On 7 January, a retaliatory attack in the Lengabo neighbourhood by FPIC against a search operation carried out by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) resulted in the killing of at least one civilian.” (UN Security Council, 18 March 2021, p. 3)

“VI. Protection of civilians [...]

B. Field-level responses [...]

37. In Ituri, MONUSCO increased joint patrols with the Congolese National Police and FARDC to deter attacks in Bunia town and its outskirts. The Mission also continued to reinforce early warning and alert networks to ensure a timely and coordinated response to the growing threats to civilians in that area. This was accompanied by enhanced community engagement to defuse tensions between communities and deter armed groups." (UN Security Council, 18 March 2021, pp. 7-8)

In February 2021, the Paris-based international non-governmental organization Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) reports on threats against two radio journalists in the city of Bunia:

"Reporters Without Borders (RSF) joins its local partner, Journalist in Danger (JED), in condemning a rebel militia's threats, including deaths threats, against two radio journalists in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and calls on the authorities to finally take decisive steps to improve the safety of Congolese media personnel. Nicolas Synthe Awacang'o, the editor in chief of Radio Canal Révélation, a popular radio station in Bunia, the capital of the eastern province of Ituri, and Freddy Upar, one of its presenters, have received a total of 14 phone calls and 13 texts from the rebel militia since 8 January in which they are threatened and accused of siding with the army. The militia, called the Patriotic and Integrationist Force of Congo (FPIC), criticizes Awacang'o for reporting its attempted incursion into Bunia. The messages he receives tell him he is banned from entering some of the city's districts. In one of the messages, the rebels said they know the colour of his motorcycle and where he lives." (RSF, 3 February 2021)

In November 2020, MONUSCO mentions security threats in and around Bunia in its report to the UN Security Council (covering 19 September to 30 November 2020):

"VI. Protection of civilians [...]

B. Field-level responses

33. [...] In Ituri, MONUSCO developed an integrated security plan to respond to growing security threats in and around Bunia. Additional efforts included strengthening community alert networks and early warning systems, as well as conducting robust joint patrols with FARDC in the most at-risk areas." (UN Security Council, 30 November 2020, p. 7)

A MONUSCO report to the UN Security Council from September 2020 refers to the following incident in Bunia:

"C. Ituri Province

17. [...] On 4 September [2020], at least 100 Djugu-based assailants entered Bunia and went to the central prison to demand the release of their members who were detained there. Following negotiations with local authorities, defence and security forces escorted the group out of Bunia and the situation returned to relative calm." (UN Security Council, 21 September 2020, p. 4)

The Doha-based news organisation Al Jazeera also reports on the incident in September 2020 in the following terms:

"Dozens of armed rebels have entered the city of Bunia in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), in an apparent show of force in protest against their treatment during a continuing peace process and to demand the release of jailed fellow fighters. Wearing white headbands to distinguish each other, the fighters from the Cooperative for the Development of Congo (CODECO) armed group on Friday morning surrounded the prison to push for the release of their comrades. [...] Army spokesman Jules Ngongo said the situation in Bunia was under control: 'They are harmless, only asking that they be taken care of by the 36th military region and seek the release of their fellow prisoners.' Videos circulating on social media showed Congolese soldiers holding back crowds of people as the fighters posed with guns and rocket launchers. No violence was reported" (Al Jazeera, 4 September 2020)

A press release from MONUSCO from October 2020 refers to an attempted attack on Bunia:

"MONUSCO has reinforced its security system on the outskirts of the town of Bunia, in Ituri, after rebels from the CODECO / ALC (Alliance for the Liberation of Congo) armed group, which was resistant to the peace process, attempted an incursion into this city. The militiamen loyal to the rebel leader called 'Mountain Wolf' attacked, very early on Saturday, October 24, 2020, an FARDC position near Dele, 6 km south-east of Bunia. [...] In the meantime, in the town of Bunia, MONUSCO organized a security patrol around the internally displaced camps. A predominantly female patrol, made up of women from the United Nations Police, including those from the Senegalese Formed Police Unit. The aim was to reassure the panic-stricken population following the clashes." (MONUSCO, 28 October 2020)

The global non-profit, non-governmental news agency Inter Press Service (IPS) published an article on the situation for people in IDP camps in Bunia in July 2021, which refers to security matters in the following terms:

"Those who flee want to get to Bunia, which is safer than the rural centers. IDPs sites, although potential targets, are patrolled by police and soldiers from the United Nations peacekeeping mission. However, a hiss is enough to generate panic. 'If you hear the shots of the bullets 7 km from where you are, why can't they get here? It is close to us,' Jean de Dieu [leader of the IDP camp ISP on the outskirts of Bunia] says. 'The camp is open, there is no fence. It can be crossed; people pass from left to right. We don't really know who they are. The assailants have already entered the city,' François Mwanza Lwanga adds with concern. He is among the leaders of the ISP camp, too. He is the president of the committee. He fled with his family and his very young baby—only two weeks old—from Sanduku, almost a hundred kilometers from Bunia. Reaching the city took them three days on foot. It was February 2018.

[...] Elena arrived at the ISP on February 12, 2018, from Bahema Baguli and she is part of the team that organizes the life at the camp, too. [...] 'We are here but we are really afraid. Several people send us messages saying that the fighting will reach us in the city, at the

camp. But may they have mercy on us!' [...] Bile, who lives at the ISP with her seven grandchildren and many other relatives, is frightened by the night crackle of firearms. 'I'm afraid of almost everything. I am traumatized and to hear that what happened to Djugu is happening here... When I remember what happened in my village, I have panic attacks,' she says. [...] Fear paralyzes. Those who live in the camp know that. Outside, insecurity does not cease. There's nothing to do but wait and hope that food aid, never enough, won't be lacking. Leaving the camp is a risk that very few take. Children, on the other hand, beg in the city center, becoming easy prey for being recruited into armed groups. The sites where displaced people live mark the boundary between the city and the countryside, but the countryside is inaccessible. 'Before, we would have gone to the fields near [Bunia] as day laborers, but those who have the courage to cross the Shali bridge never come back. If you go far, they can kill you for nothing,' explains Rachel Turache, a mother of five who lives in Kigonze and comes from Liseyi. She represents those who live in the bloc, 1 sector B." (IPS, 29 July 2021)

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