
Invading Armies and Congo's Human Disaster

An Interview with Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dr. Faida Mitifu

Dr. Faida Mitifu, PhD, is Ambassador to the United States of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.). She was interviewed by Lawrence Freeman, on May 8.

EIR: Right now, the Congo is in the news quite a bit, with some very important stories. Mrs. Ambassador, would you comment on the recent report that 3 million Congolese have been killed, as a result of the armies that have invaded the Congo since 1998? Could you give us some background on that?

Ambassador Mitifu: As you know, since Aug. 2, 1998, my country has been a victim of an unjust invasion by its neighbors from Rwanda, Uganda, and later on, Burundi. Ever since the beginning of the war, large-scale massacres have been perpetrated on the people of Congo, particularly in the eastern part of the country. You would also remember that during the third week of the war, the armies of Rwanda and Uganda cut off electricity and water to the city of Kinshasa, a city of 6 million people. And, during that time, actually, in Kinshasa, many, many people died in the hospitals because they did not have access to water, to electricity, and to the care they needed to get well.

From Day One, we denounced the invasion and the massacres, especially in the eastern part of the country. Three million deaths have occurred in the occupied territories, controlled by the armies of Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. We have denounced the killings; we have denounced the inaction of the international community, but, unfortunately, it didn't seem that anyone listened to us then. But, we are happy that finally—finally—the international community has awakened; that they are trying now to get a little more involved in the issues of the Congo.

Particularly, right now, the attention is finally focussed

on the humanitarian situation in the Congo. It's a little bit late for the 3 million-or-so Congolese people who have already lost their lives because of this war. But we are just hoping that the international community not only will continue to get involved, at least, to alleviate the humanitarian situation of the Congolese people; but also, that they will continue to put pressure on the invading countries of the Congo.

EIR: You talked about “invading armies of the Congo,” as the cause of this humanitarian disaster. Could you say exactly who are the invading armies? Where are they located? Who is behind them, and what has been their policy?

Ambassador Mitifu: As you know, Congo has been a victim of the aggression from its neighboring countries: Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi.

EIR: And they have specific groups that they fund and support?

Ambassador Mitifu: Yes, because what is going on in the Congo, is not a rebellion, as it has been entertained by the international media. From Day One, you have to remember that an invasion took place. Armies from Uganda and Rwanda invaded Congo. And it was only within two weeks or so of the invasion, that they *created* rebel movements.

First, they created the RCD movement in Goma; and then later on, about two months later, Uganda created the MLC movement in the Northeast part of the country. The RCD, in French, is Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie—Rally for Congolese Democracy. The MLC would be the Congolese Liberation Movement, with Jean-Pierre Bemba. The RCD has known, so far, several leaders: the Rwandans first used Zahidi Ngoma who was replaced by Prof. Wamba dia wa Wamba; then came Dr. Emile Ilunga, who was re-

FIGURE 10
Political Division of the Democratic Republic of the Congo



The invading armies of the Congo, whose genocide is described by Ambassador Mitifu, have effectively partitioned the country in their slaughter and grab for resources.

placed by Adolphe Onusumba.

They created this movement only later on, to give this makeup of a rebellion in the Congo. And it's these countries, actually, that have been training and equipping these rebel movements. And they still have their armies on Congolese soil.

EIR: And that's one thing that people should know—that they're still occupying approximately half of the country, and entire section of the northern and the eastern part of the country. Now, there's been discussion recently, with the new Presi-

dent, Joseph Kabila, coming into office, of some pullback of these rebel forces. Is there a pullback going on? How are these rebel armies acting now, under the so-called "agreement for peace" in the Congo?

Ambassador Mitifu: Thank you for the question. The pullback is in response to the Kampala disengagement plan, and also the Harare disengagement sub-plan. So far there have been two meetings on the withdrawal of the troops. The Kampala disengagement plan was signed on April 14, 2000 and the Harare disengagement sub-plan was signed Dec. 6, 2000. Recently, in February, there was a joint meeting be-

tween the UN Security Council and the Political Committee of the Joint Military Commission which unites all the belligerents in the war in the Congo. After that meeting, there was a resolution from the Security Council, Resolution 1341, which, finally, demanded the implementation of both plans, the Kampala disengagement plan and the sub-plan of Harare. Troops were supposed to pull back 15 kilometers on each side. And also, Rwanda reiterated its unilateral commitment to pull back 200 km.

Yet, we have to be careful about what has been portrayed as, almost, a generous offer from Rwanda, to pull back 200 km; because, although we all welcome it, we have to be very careful. Because, we are seeing now more troops from Rwanda pulled out from the front line, [while] massive deployments of Rwandan troops have been reported in North and South Kivu. And these troops are not just staying in the urban areas, but are being deployed away from the urban areas; so, we don't have a clear explanation of this movement, which is really in violation, not only of the Lusaka Accord, which we all signed, but also in violation of UN resolutions 1304 and 1341.

EIR: The Rwandans said they were going to pull back 200 km. Would that remove them completely from the soil of the D.R.C.? And have any of them actually left the D.R.C., or are they just consolidating their positions?

Ambassador Mitifu: Looking at what people in eastern Congo are witnessing, I'll be tempted to say that it's more to consolidate their position in the D.R.C.; because when you hear about the 200 km pullout from the front line, they are still deep, deep into the D.R.C.; because they were far away from the border—up to 700 miles away from the border. So pulling out 200 km is okay, but not significant.

EIR: There has also been a report from the United Nations, commissioned by Kofi Annan, that documents the massive looting by these two rebel armies that you've been referring to, which are both sponsored by Uganda and Rwanda—that they have looted the Congo of several hundred million dollars, or maybe more, in natural resources. This report has just been made public. What is the background of this?

Ambassador Mitifu: From Day One, Rwanda and Uganda have used the pretense of invading Congo because of their security problem—they said they invaded Congo to ensure security at their border—from Day One, we denounced this pretense. We knew they were in the Congo for Congolese natural resources, then.

So we've had NGOs [non-governmental organizations], Congolese NGOs, who have investigated the looting of the Congolese natural resources, before. And we have the Pierre Lumbi report, which clearly spoke about some officials from Rwanda, from Uganda, and their cronies in Congo, who were involved in this illegal exploitation of minerals in the Congo. We've had illegal exploitation of gold, of diamonds, of coltan, of perichlore, of cassiterite, of coffee, of timber. All these

products have been and are being exploited illegally.

We denounced already back in August or September 1998, the involvement of Museveni's own brother, Gen. Salim Saleh; his direct involvement in the trafficking of Congolese natural resources. We cited then, Gen. James Kazini, who was the chief of staff of the Ugandan Army at the time, and his direct involvement in the trafficking. We mentioned an accident that occurred in a northeastern province of the Congo, an accident in which General Kazini's brother died with some traffickers of different nationalities, who died in that plane crash. That plane was carrying gold and other minerals.

We have been denouncing this; but until, probably, last year, we really didn't have an ear that listened to us. So we were very, very happy when finally, the UN Secretary General appointed the UN panel to investigate on this illegal exploitation. And this report shows clearly that there is massive, massive looting of Congolese natural resources, going through Rwanda, Uganda, And Burundi. They have created some companies through which this illegal exploitation of Congolese natural resources is going on. The report even gives the list of companies involved in this illegal exploitation.

EIR: Is this still going on now?

Ambassador Mitifu: It's still going on now. The UN panel report made, also, some recommendations: among others, sanctions against some countries involved in this illegal exploitation. My government and the people of the D.R.C. support these recommendations. But recently, after a debate on the report, the UN Security Council has recommended that the mandate for this panel be extended for three more months, to probably clarify certain things.

EIR: Regarding this humanitarian disaster, there are some reports that maybe as many as 4.5 million people have died. It's also been brought out, that most of these people did not die due to being directly wounded, or killed in the war, but through lack of health care and food (see accompanying articles). How many millions of people are endangered in the Congo now, and what kind of steps have to be taken to provide relief for these people under these conditions, and what can the government do about it?

Ambassador Mitifu: People who have died from gunshot wounds, or machetes, or by the armies of Rwanda, Burundi, and even Uganda, or through machetes due to ethnic rifts instigated by Uganda in the northern part of the country, the number has been estimated at around 300,000. That's a lot. Now, the rest have died mainly of diseases and of malnutrition. Why? Because they have been forced to run away from their areas; they have been forced into life in the forests and in the bushes, because they are running away from the killings war. The places that have been the most targetted by these invader armies are mainly rural areas. As you know, as someone who knows Africa very well, food comes from the rural areas. It's the rural areas that feed the urban areas. So, when

you have peasants running from the rural areas, it means that there is no food, and they are forced into life in the forest, where there is no food; there is no access to medical care; there is no access to school for children, etc.

This is what has been happening—these people are mostly displaced people, who have been dying of hunger, because they are not able to produce what they can eat. A representative from the World Food Program went to Kasika, which is in South Kivu. You will remember that Kasika was probably the very first victim of a massive, massive massacre of its population—1,000 people in Kasika, back in August 1998, were killed at the hands of soldiers from Rwanda. Members of the World Food Program went to Kasika recently, and what they found, was malnourished adults, but there were almost no children. And when they asked where the children were, most of the children had died. You can imagine such a situation: Kasika is a totally traumatized village, where 1,000 of its population was killed, including the chief of the village and his young wife. This is really the situation in the eastern Congo. Because war creates economic hardship, there is a lack of access to medical facilities, and a lack of access to medicine throughout the country, particularly in territories under occupation.

EIR: What plans does the government have, for the massive job of providing food, water, and health care for the country?

Ambassador Mitifu: Right now, the first step is to allow the humanitarian organizations to have access to these remote areas. But again, there is also a second problem that arises: Congo has had its independence since 1960, and since 1965, Congo was ruled by the kleptocratic regime of Mobutu, who never built any road infrastructure in the Congo. Even the little of infrastructure left by the Belgians, was totally destroyed. Mobutu didn't care about rebuilding the country. We have the problem of *access* to these remote areas, because of the lack of roads. These are some of the problems which these humanitarian groups are faced with: How do you access some of the remote areas, where there are no roads that lead to these areas? The first step is that the government is asking the international community to come to Congo's rescue, especially as far as the humanitarian situation is concerned. We have opened our doors to humanitarian groups; even in the occupied territory, humanitarian groups can, at least, start having access to the population.

The government wants the war to end so we can rebuild our country. Dialogue with Bretton Wood institutions is going relatively well, and so is the dialogue with other partners of the D.R.C.

EIR: Are the rebel groups allowing the humanitarian groups into those territories?

Ambassador Mitifu: Yes, I think so. It has been that the World Food Program went to Kasika, so I assume that they did allow them access to these people. The second thing—and this is not really second—the wish of my government:

There is no worse human rights abuse than the war itself. And we've asked for the international community, and the United States in particular, to put more pressure on these invading armies, so that they withdraw their troops from Congo. This will be, actually, the best and quickest way to remediate this humanitarian situation. And also, that will help us, actually, to start rebuilding our economy. We have made some reform at the economic level, such as liberalizing our currency, and so forth—these are just small steps, actually, to revamp our economy.

On the political front, we want all the Congolese to get together freely, without guns being pointed at their neck, so that they can control what will be said at the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. We want all the Congolese to come together and to discuss the fate of our country. We want all the Congolese to be reconciled. That is very, very important for us.

But we also want that every Congolese who comes there, come there to speak for the people of the Congo, but the Inter-Congolese Dialogue should not be a forum where individuals will position themselves as individuals; they have to come to speak for the people of the Congo. They have to have some kind of mandate from the people.

EIR: So this is a conference you are pulling together?

Ambassador Mitifu: There is a discussion process, a forum, which is called Inter-Congolese Dialogue. That is coming, but yet again, our wish is for the foreign invading armies to pull out of the Congo: Would the RCD come to speak for the Congolese people? They cannot . . . because they are totally unpopular in the area they occupied. So, would they come to push the Rwandan agenda at the Inter-Congolese Dialogue? That will be unacceptable, and I don't see them coming in to speak freely for Congo. And the same thing goes for the MLC.

EIR: Since the young Kabila has become President, there has been a lot of positive publicity and accolades for the new leader. Has there been any concrete assistance given by any governments to the Congo? And has anyone responded to the demand you just stated—especially those governments in the West who are giving support to Rwanda and Uganda—have they made any response toward enforcing the withdrawal of their two rebel forces? That would be a legitimate response.

Ambassador Mitifu: One of the concrete steps is that the European Union has just deployed \$106 million in aid to Congo. This was an assistance that was blocked back in the 1990s, when the international community was putting pressure on Mobutu, to democratize. So these funds have been released, and that's a very good, concrete step from the European Union, and it's welcome. We hope that this will open doors to other countries, such as the United States.

The United States, so far, has contributed, in terms of humanitarian assistance, mainly. We have got, so far, about \$13 million in humanitarian assistance from the U.S. this year. Unfortunately, this \$13 million is already finished. So now we are hoping we will be able to convince the Congress to be

more pro-active, and release more funds to what has been referred to as, probably, the worst humanitarian disaster in the history of the world. And we are hoping that the European Union step towards the Congo will be followed by the United States and the rest of the world, to help Congo get back to its feet.

EIR: And has there been any response to the request for pressure to get the invading countries to pull out?

Ambassador Mitifu: Obviously, everybody is supportive of the Lusaka Accord, and everybody feels that all must be done, within this framework. But, the Congolese people want these armies to leave now, today; because that, for them, is the only jump-start of economic recovery, and the only jump-start to put an end to the humanitarian disaster.

Uganda, Rwanda Armies Must Leave Congo Now

by Lawrence K. Freeman

Since the Jan. 16 death of President Laurent Kabila and the “official peace” in the Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.), two reports have been published which provide a public glimpse into the dimension of devastating *physical destruction* of that nation as a result of the years-long succession of wars perpetrated by Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi.

One report, issued by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in May, details the fantastic increase of mortalities as a result of the “protracted and violent conflict” that raged in the occupied eastern section of the D.R.C., which is the area the invading armies have militarily occupied since August 1998.

The second, 56 pages long, is the result of an investigation commissioned by United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan in June 2000, and submitted to the Security Council on April 2, entitled, “Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.”

Slaughter and Looting of Wealth

The investigative panel appointed by Kofi Annan cited, in particular, Uganda and Rwanda, and their proxy armies, the MLC (Congolese Liberation Movement), and the RDC (Rally for Congolese Democracy). Here are only a few of the incidents contained in the UN report.

- RCD soldiers collected “taxes” at gunpoint from the areas they occupied, and stole between \$1 and \$8 million in Congolese francs from Kinshasa Central Bank.

- RCD and MLC forces took over commerce and trade by force when necessary, and established unprecedented con-

trol of the economy in eastern and northeastern D.R.C.

- Uganda, which produces virtually no gold at all, became a gold exporter of 11.45 tons in 1999 and 10.83 tons in 2000, as a result of shipping stolen gold across the border.

- Uganda increased its export of diamonds from 1,511 carats in 1997 to 11,303 carats in 1998, and more than 11,000 carats in 2000, also as result of stealing from the D.R.C.

- Rwanda increased its exports in diamonds from 166 carats in 1998 to 30,491 carats in 2000 by the same looting methods.

The Executive Summary of the IRC report, which covers the period from February 1999 to April 2001, estimates that as a result of the war, 2.5 million people died in excess of normal mortalities. Officials from the D.R.C. estimate that for the entire war period, it is closer to 4.5 million excess deaths, of whom more than 4 million died of diseases untreated due to the absence of health care in the fighting zones, and more than 300,000 in the combat. Even now, as the humanitarian disaster has been recognized, because of the non-existence of basic infrastructure, relief cannot reach the suffering population. It is estimated that 70-80% of the population—35-40 million people—is *presently* considered “endangered” due to these conditions.

In eastern D.R.C., where the invasions began, five of the seven areas visited showed fewer births than deaths, and four of seven showed 8% or more of the population dying over the two-year period. Before the war these areas had a population growth of approximately 3%. It is estimated that nationally one in eight households has experienced a violent death, and 40% of those deaths are women and children.

In Moba and Kalemie, the estimate is that 75% of children born during the war have died, or will die before their second birthday.

For the D.R.C. to reconstruct itself as a nation, the rest of the world, especially the West, must: 1) provide not only immediate humanitarian aid, but teams of workers and engineers to build roads and other infrastructure necessary for the delivery of food and medicine to the beleaguered population; 2) order the invading armies from Rwanda and Uganda out of the D.R.C. without any delay.

Hearings Confirm EIR Congo Warning of 1997

by Suzanne Rose

The truth about the catastrophic genocide occurring in the Congo and Great Lakes region of Africa, and the British and American role in that genocide, began finally to emerge in Congressional hearings May 18. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) convened a hearing of the Human Rights