

UN weighs expanded DR Congo force

By [Global Research](#)

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The UN Security Council has overcome its reluctance to send more peacekeepers to help avert a new war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, according to a senior UN official.

Alain Le Roy, the UN under-secretary-general for peacekeeping, made the announcement on Tuesday after briefing the council on his request for 3,000 more soldiers and police.

The extra personnel will reinforce the 17,000-strong Congo peacekeeping mission, Monuc, the largest UN force in the world.

“Many members of the council have expressed their support for strengthening Monuc and augmenting, increasing the number of troops in the Monuc,” Le Roy said.

“No decision has been taken yet by the council, but I think the mood is evolving into reinforcing the troops.”

The view was supported by Atoki Ileka, the UN ambassador for Congo, who said: “The council will eventually come around to supporting the increase but it will take some time.”

Thousands displaced

Weeks of violence have forced more than 250,000 people to flee their homes or ramshackle camps where they had taken shelter, bringing the number of internal refugees from years of fighting above one million.

Monuc said on Wednesday that thousands of displaced people who took refuge near a UN peacekeeping base in the east of the country were forced to flee by the CNDP, the rebel group headed by renegade General Laurent Nkunda.

Sylvie Van Der Wildenberg, a spokesperson, said: “Monuc has noticed since yesterday [Tuesday] evening that the vast majority of displaced who were sheltering around the base at Kiwanja have left their temporary camp.

“We have strong fears that these people have been forced to go back (to their homes) ... indicating that the CNDP told them to leave the area.

“If that’s the case, that would constitute a serious violation of international law.”

UN chief’s appeal

Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general, who has repeatedly urged the divided Security

Council to take swift action on Monuc's request for reinforcements, said that over 100,000 refugees were desperate and virtually cut off from aid.

Ban said he hoped the Security Council would consider Le Roy's proposal "positively and favourably" on Tuesday.

Peter Edopu, director of the Institute for Security Studies, told Al Jazeera that "the UN is basically fruitless".

"The danger is that if they (UN troops) open fire, the others will open fire back, and the UN would have simply been over run given their small number," he said.

"The UN needs to sanction more troops to keep the peace, and not just peacekeeping by name."

Fighting between Tutsi rebels and pro-government troops and groups has degenerated into sporadic clashes in recent days as African leaders pressed both sides to avoid a regional war.

Meanwhile, a group of human rights and aid activists, speaking at UN headquarters in New York, said the Security Council must act with urgency.

Anneke Van Woudenberg of Human Rights Watch urged the body "to move fast to increase the number of peacekeepers and save lives".

'Serious consideration'

John Sawers, the British ambassador, said the council would give Le Roy's request for reinforcements "serious consideration" but made clear that member states wanted first to be certain that troops now in DR Congo were as effectively deployed as possible.

The council will not make a decision before it receives a new report by Ban on Monuc next week and may take weeks to pass a resolution approving additional troops.

Le Roy cautioned that it would take at least two months for any troop reinforcements to arrive in DR Congo.

In the meantime, he said, he was redeploying existing troops throughout the eastern Congo, above all in the crisis area around Goma, the capital of Nord-Kivu province.

Separately, Angola announced on Wednesday that it was mobilising troops to send to DR Congo.

Georges Chicoty, the Angolan deputy foreign minister, did not say how many soldiers would be sent or what their mission would be.

It was unclear whether they would be acting as peacekeepers or supporting the government in its fight against Nkunda's fighters.

'Shoot to kill'

Asked if Monuc peacekeepers had the right to "shoot to kill" if they deemed it necessary to protect civilians in Congo, Le Roy said: "The answer is yes."

However, some countries on the council, including South Africa, have said that Monuc's mandate did not allow it to act aggressively enough to protect civilians in danger.

Dumisani Kumalo, the South African envoy, said: "We have a problem now, because we have Monuc on the ground with all the intentions to protect civilians, but it's not working out well."

Jorge Urbina, the Costa Rican ambassador and the current council president, said most council members agreed the current mandate gave Monuc the right to do what it needed to protect people.

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