

Testimony of Roger Meece
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Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, and Members of the Committee,

I am honored to testify today regarding one of Africa's longest-running areas of conflict and large-scale humanitarian crises, and I thank you for this opportunity. Too often this area is in my view erroneously viewed as condemned to permanent instability, not susceptible to resolution. I am therefore particularly appreciative of this Committee's focus on prospects for peace in the region.

Having had the opportunity to work in the region over the span of many years, I can affirm that significant progress has been achieved in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Great Lakes region in many key aspects, putting in place essential elements to provide for long-term stability and development. I am also well aware, however, of continuing major problems, and resultant enormous human suffering marked by widespread ongoing violence, large population displacements, and appalling levels of sexual-based violence. Members of this Committee are well aware that this is in the context of ongoing conflict, especially in eastern Congo, dating from the 1990's. The conflict has been catalyzed by weak government authority and institutions in the Congo and external involvement in the Congo, at one point involving at least eight national armies operating in Congolese territory. The legacy of this terrible history has left four foreign armed groups from Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi still operating in the D.R.C., and a large number of domestic Congolese armed groups or militias of varying capabilities. The latter are marked by shifting alliances and ties, and overall have a character more of criminal gangs than ideologically-based groups. All the armed groups, foreign and domestic, prey on the civilian populations in areas where they operate.

Against this backdrop, there are positive elements on which to build a stable and successful future, albeit all requiring further development. First, despite years of conflict, foreign occupation, division of the Congo into zones controlled by competing armies, and ongoing conflict, there is a sense of Congolese national self-identity that crosses political, ethnic, and political boundaries – an essential prerequisite for future stability. This national self-identity, however, is tempered with national cohesion threatened by underlying tensions driven by regional, ethnic, political and other divisions fed by a competition for resources in a country desperately in need of economic opportunity for its population. In another important area, in recent years the Democratic Republic of the Congo has achieved impressive improvements in its macro-economic performance marked by good GDP growth rates, stable exchange rates, low inflation, and improving foreign exchange reserves. This has been particularly true during the tenure of Prime Minister Matata with his focus on economic reforms. These achievements, however, have not yet resulted in general broad benefits for average Congolese, with investment and commercial activity hampered by a continuing lack of transparency in key areas of economic activity, corruption, and an overall very difficult environment for business operations. On a regional level, critically important relations, especially between Kinshasa, Kigali, and Kampala, have progressed from open warfare to the reestablishment of formal diplomatic relations and ongoing contacts at multiple levels, albeit all continuing to be marked by deep mutual mistrust and accusations of cross-border misconduct. Finally, a promising start to democratic government has been made in the Congo, with the 2006 elections the first legitimate democratic exercise in the country since independence. Free and fully participatory government, however, clearly remains an incomplete and threatened process in the Congo, as well as in several of its neighbors. Within these threats lie the seeds of potential future further domestic and regional instability.

In all these and other problem areas, the size of the Congo, the large population involved, and the relative lack of infrastructure contribute to the difficulty of putting

solutions in place. Projects, initiatives, and development programs must often confront dimensions of scale that render implementation difficult, or in some cases producing incomplete results.

These circumstances suggest to me the outlines for a path forward to peace, stability, and improved prospects for development, and appropriate roles for the international community to facilitate solutions. I strongly believe such solutions for the region are not only achievable, and are of key importance for not just central Africa, but a significant portion of the continent. Full international community engagement and support is essential for these solutions to be achieved.

First, the key priority must be to establish basic security and order, particularly in eastern Congo. Very promising progress has been made recently in this regard, with the Congolese M23 armed movement in the Kivus defeated by the Congolese Army (FARDC) bolstered by a strengthened UN peacekeeping force (MONUSCO), including the operations of the newly-established Force Intervention Brigade. While this brigade is quite properly fully integrated into the Mission structure and command, I believe its mandate providing for a strengthened peace enforcement role and specialized capabilities have provided a critical new element, and opened the door for progress after too many years of ongoing conflict. With the end of the M23's military operations, primary attention has turned to other major foreign groups. These include the Rwandan FDLR and Ugandan ADF, both representing major ongoing threats to civilians and regional stability, albeit with the FDLR's capability significantly reduced from what it was several years ago. As well, domestic militias cannot be neglected, and are responsible for many massacres, extensive violence, and large-scale human suffering. Broadly speaking, however, their force and military capabilities in no way compares to those of the foreign armed groups.

It is important to emphasize that the FARDC and MONUSCO recent successes do not mean that a military solution to the issues of eastern Congo and Great Lakes region represents the answer to the problems of the region. Rather the increased

capability and authority to operate pre-emptively against those committed to armed action provides an essential tool to help establish the conditions that permit comprehensive strategies and programs to be put in place. Beneficial effects of these military operations include the prospect of significantly increased flows of foreign and Congolese combatants seeking voluntary disarmament and reintegration into their home communities, increased prospects for needed political agreements to be achieved within the Congo and between Congo and its neighbors, and realization of the conditions necessary to establish and extend needed state authority throughout the Congo, clearly a prerequisite for long-term stability and development.

These military operations are and must be a part of a comprehensive strategy for the region which includes a number of elements. In my view, I would identify four areas of particular importance.

1. Political and economic normalization of regional relations, especially between the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda.

While formal reestablishment of diplomatic relations, and especially last year's achievement of a regional Framework Accord, have been very important steps, a sad history of failed accords and peace agreements is testimony to the fact that these agreements by themselves are not enough. The aspirations represented by the goals of the Framework Accord must be realized through commitments and actions by the respective parties, and such commitments have not necessarily been evident. Strong positions taken by the United States and other countries have been essential to a major change in cross-border actions by neighboring states contributing to instability. It is not clear, however, that such cross-border support has ended fully, and it is important for international attention to continue. Treatment of M23 leaders who have fled to Uganda and Rwanda, including some for whom substantial evidence exists of responsibility for war crimes, will be an important indicator of policies consistent with Framework Accord principles. Reports from the UN Panel

of Experts, the UN Missions and agencies in the region, non-government organizations, and other sources will also be very useful to a full understanding of conditions throughout the region.

2. Congolese institutional reforms and conflict resolution.

It is of obvious importance to accelerate Congolese reform programs of key institutions, including the police, judiciary, and perhaps most importantly the military, which for long was essentially stalled. These reform objectives certainly include improved performance, for example through appropriate training programs, but must also address organizational structural changes to facilitate full deployments of necessary civilian and uniformed personnel, necessary physical infrastructure development, needed and appropriate oversight mechanisms, and well qualified and trained personnel at all management levels. There is also a pressing need for effective disarmament, demobilization, and civilian reintegration programs (DDR), avoiding past mistakes that failed to provide for successful long-term civilian integration of militia and other armed combatants, lacked accountability standards for egregious abuses of human-rights or other serious crimes, and too often provided the wrong incentives, including essential wholesale integration of people into the FARDC. The latter not only propagated the cycle of militia activity and a general sense of impunity, but also degraded overall FARDC standards of performance and behavior. In this regard, the recently enacted amnesty law in the Congo provides an encouraging step, incorporating lessons learned. There is much more to be done, however, to develop comprehensive and effective DDR and military reform programs.

It is also important that that there be increased attention to conflict resolution essentially addressing localized issues. In various areas, these include difficult land issues, return of displaced populations, ethnic and community tensions, and other social and political issues. Strong involvement by local leaders, including clergy, traditional leaders, and others of influence in the respective areas is key to this

effort, as underlying cultural and social aspects are complex. Progress is, however, essential to achieve durable security, not only in eastern Congo, but in other regions, for example in Katanga province where growing violence is creating very significant new security and humanitarian concerns.

3. Economic and social development

In addition to the obvious need for development for a large population long struggling to achieve an acceptable standard of living, there is a direct linkage between economic conditions and security. The attractiveness of local militias to young people would be greatly reduced by increased prospects of a productive livelihood through legitimate means. As well, existing large-scale illicit mining and trade of Congo's minerals involving both Congolese and foreign interests, provide an important source of support for many armed groups, and does little to promote the general well-being of the local population. Congolese economic potential, in eastern Congo and across the country, is well recognized. Realization of this potential requires simplification of the maze of regulations, taxes, and other burdens imposed by a large number of poorly coordinated and financed government agencies, greatly increased transparency regarding mining concessions and contracts and general commercial activities, and major improvements in judicial operations to provide for increased business confidence. None of this is easy to achieve, and it will require difficult decisions, including likely unpopular civil service reforms. Essential improvements, however, will not only increase prospects for legitimate investment and commercial activities, including employment levels, but as well an expanded tax base for essential government operations now hobbled by completely inadequate government budgets at both the national and provincial level.

4. Democratic governance

Free and unhindered popular participation in an open political system clearly can contribute to long-term stability in the region. While the 2006 Congolese elections

represented a very promising major step forward, subsequent developments, including the flawed 2011 elections, underscore that a stable and successful democratic future for the country is far from assured. Very important provincial elections which should have been held as a part of the 2011 election cycle have not yet been held, resulting in the co-existence of 2006 produced legislative bodies at the provincial level and national Senate, with a 2011 elected National Assembly and executive president. Local elections provided for in the 2006 constitution have not been held to-date at all. Very difficult and contentious issues associated with prospective decentralization measures also contained in the new constitution pose further risks at both the provincial and national levels. It is my understanding that planning is underway to hold the delayed provincial and local elections, although I would note that time is growing short before the next scheduled general national elections expected in 2016. All of these will require substantial domestic efforts, and I hope that the reformed Independent National Election Commission will be equal to the task. I have little doubt, however, considerable continuing external support will be required as well. A fractious national political structure, with hundreds of parties and political figures largely based on narrow regional, community, and ethnic interests obviously adds to this challenge.

I must also note that problems of open, free, and fair democratic government are not limited to the Congo. Political systems in most of Congo's neighbors, notably to include neighbors Rwanda and Uganda, are far from free and well-functioning democratic models. Recent major security problems in the Central African Republic (C.A.R.) and South Sudan underscore the threats to domestic and regional stability that can arise from elsewhere in the region. All contain the seeds of potential cross-border violence and wider conflict, and all should be a focus of international concern.

The agenda outlined obviously is not a simple one, nor is it susceptible to quick or short-term solutions. It is, however, achievable. When the situation of present-day Congo and Great Lakes region is contrasted with that of five, ten, or fifteen years

ago, the progress already made is dramatic, and provides a good foundation to move forward. Clearly, the leaders, governments, and people of the region bear the primary responsibility to build their own future and achieve the security, economic, and social success needed and deserved by all the people of the region. I firmly believe continued international community engagement and support, however, is important and necessary.

The United States has played a key role for many years through bilateral programs, in coordination with other partners, and through multilateral institutions including the U.N. and international finance institutions. I strongly urge that such engagement continue. United States bilateral diplomatic and assistance programs well targeted toward priority objectives are key, including support for positive developments, and as needed frank criticism of negative or unhelpful policies and actions. Obviously, close coordination with other partners including traditional donors such as various European governments, the European Union and Japan is essential to maximize effectiveness. Close cooperation with African institutions and governments including the African Union, Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and its member states, and other governments in the region is also of critical importance. The fact that those contributing troops to the MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade consist exclusively of SADC member states is no accident, and reflects the interest attached to the region by these governments, and the important role those countries play. Close consultation and collaboration with other key partners, including fellow Security Council permanent member China and Russia, have also been important and helped the international community to speak and act in a unified manner on issues of the region. Strong U.S. support to the UN peacekeeping Mission in the Congo, as well as other Missions in the region, for example through the Security Council and American financial support, has been of critical importance to avoid on many occasions general collapse and for key initiatives such as the F.I.B. and deployment of reconnaissance UAV's, and the overall effectiveness of the U.N. Mission's work.

The appointment of Special Envoy Feingold has in my view been a key action to bolster effectiveness of international community action. The close collaboration achieved with U.N. Special Envoy Mary Robinson, and other Special Envoys of the African Union, European Union, and various governments, and the UN Special Representative in the Congo, has I think already demonstrated the utility and effectiveness of this work. I believe this is particularly important as the Framework Accord and other agreements largely set out desired goals and objectives, but the Framework Accord lacks effective oversight or enforcement mechanisms, and it is certainly not at all clear that all signatories had a real commitment to realize its provisions. The burden of ensuring success of this initiative, therefore, has largely fallen on the team of Special Envoys. Their strong engagement is likely to continue to be needed I believe for some time given the scale and complexity of the issues involved.

I must also note, however, that we should not overestimate our powers to control events or achieve desired results. Many of the issues in the Congo and region involve complex social, cultural, ethnic, and other issues with long and deep roots, often difficult to understand fully. Solutions, including viable structures, institutions, and relationships must in any case be built on indigenous foundations. Sensitivity not simply to sovereignty concerns, but to the views and expertise of regional, national, and local leaders, and related cultural, social and other factors is essential, and will often dictate the shape and nature of actions, development, and solutions. We neglect such considerations only with considerable peril to the very objectives we seek to realize.

I have no illusions of the difficulty and scope of the continuing remaining challenges. I am convinced, however, that building on the work already done solutions are achievable. Further, I am convinced that current prospects are better than they have ever been to achieve real and durable peace and security in eastern Congo and Great Lakes region. I am also convinced this result will require substantial engagement and support from the international community, and specifically from

the United States, likely for some time. I believe, however, the importance of putting an end to the long-running humanitarian disaster and violence of the region provides a strong rationale for this engagement. It is important that we are not locked into a quasi-permanent cycle requiring international community ongoing engagement without end in Great Lakes conflict resolution and related large-scale humanitarian relief and other actions, with attendant risks to even broader conflict in Africa. Peace can be achieved, and I believe current policies and actions provide a good basis to be optimistic of progress.