

## Rwanda and Congo Work Together in Joint Operation

By Bahati Ntama Jacques, Policy Analyst

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Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to be a case of international and national concern. Although the Congo-Rwanda conflict has cooled down since the capture of National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP in French) rebel leader Laurent Nkunda, the continuous presence of the rebel group, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), in eastern Congo is a potential reason for armed conflict between the two nations to resume. Despite questions of legitimacy and trust, a deal was reached in January between Congo and Rwanda. As a result, a joint military force, Operation Umoja Wetu (which means ‘Our Unity’), was launched. Did this operation yield the expected outcome for the two countries?



The Rwandan and Congolese flags at the official ceremony ending Operation Umoja Wetu.

On February 25, 2009, an official ceremony to end the joint military operation Umoja Wetu – a coalition of troops from Rwanda and D.R.

Congo against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) – took place in the city of Goma. This operation was launched to pacify war-torn eastern Congo’s North and South Kivu provinces. Although we do not know many details of the deal between the Rwandan and the Congolese government, evidence on the ground shows that the Congolese government compromise was to allow the Rwandan troops to come in Congo and work alongside the Congolese army to disarm FDLR. FDLR is a Rwandan rebel group that has been operating in eastern Congo since 1994 and whose members are wanted in Rwanda for crimes of genocide.

In return, the Rwandan government had to withdraw its military support to the Congolese rebel group CNDP and its leader Laurent Nkunda. The implementation of this

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highly political deal was started by CNDP top military commander, Jean Bosco Ntaganda. He unexpectedly declared that Laurent Nkunda, the Rwandan government’s longtime friend and war proxy was no longer the leader of the movement and that he was ready for negotiation and integration of CNDP forces into the Congolese army. Soon after the Rwandan army officially entered Congolese territory, on January 23, 2009 they arrested Laurent Nkunda, who is still detained in Rwanda. His extradition

return of many internally displaced people to their villages. Also, in cities such as Goma, for example, a few families from the Congolese Tutsi community are daring to move back into the city once again, a place they left for safety reasons due to the Tutsi community’s active participation on the Rwandan side of the war. Whether the Congolese government will maximize these gains and use them to extend state authority remains to be seen.

Will military force solve the threat that FDLR poses to the Congo and Rwanda? The answer is “no” for several reasons. First, the Congo forests have been proven to be a great place for FDLR to hide and escape any attack against them. Second, the Congolese army has no means, is not well organized, and not strong enough to take them on effectively. Third, the political weakness and ineffectiveness of the Congolese

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to D.R. Congo, as agreed upon before his capture, is still in process. The latest news about this issue is that the Rwanda government does not want to extradite him to Congo, but to a neutral nation because Congo (unlike Rwanda) has not abolished the death penalty.

Opinions over the success of Umoja Wetu operations are divided. On one hand, it is very clear that operation Umoja Wetu was a failure because the FDLR rebellion did not end, despite the Rwandan government’s efforts. FDLR fighters have taken back some of their previous positions and moved into many new areas, killing, looting, and raping innocent Congolese people. They are very active now in Masisi, Lubero, Rutshuru, and Walikale territories. To address this issue, the Congolese army, with the support of the United Nation’s peace keeping mission in DRC (MONUC), launched another military operation, Kimya II, against FDLR on May 28th.

On the other hand, operation Umoja Wetu was a good political decision for the Congo. Despite accusations that the Congo government was supporting FDLR and did nothing to repatriate them, the Rwandan government was given an opportunity to come and see for themselves that it is not easy task to take out the FDLR. The Rwandan government always justified its military involvement in the Congo as an effort to end FDLR presence in Congo because of its national security. The operation led to the removal of checkpoints and brought relative peace in many former rebel controlled areas. It instigated the ongoing integration of CNDP forces in the Congolese army and the

government is favorable ground for them to stay. Unfortunately, FDLR is not going anywhere anytime soon, despite its threat to peace in both Congo and Rwanda. Africa Faith & Justice Network continues to advocate that the Congolese government and the international community demand that the Rwandan government open political space to FDLR by direct dialogue. Then, FDLR’s departure to Rwanda would allow the Congolese government to focus on its myriad of other problems, such as other Congolese rebel groups and control of the mining sector.

Although the region is continually beset by war and violence, life carries on for many families in and around Goma. For their sake, the Congolese and Rwandan governments must come together to address the FDLR problem.



## Women of Wajir

By Andy Fallon, Intern

In the early 1990's, six women began a process that transformed much of the Wajir district in northeast Kenya. Attempting to cope with what was described as a "disaster waiting to happen," these women formed a community-based approach to halting the violence. Their efforts should serve as an example to communities across the continent who are seeking another path to peace.

In 1991, a state of emergency was declared in the Wajir region as drought destroyed nearly 80 percent of the animal stock in this primarily pastoral society. As a result of state collapse in Somalia, refugees and weapons flowed into the region. Food and water were scarce; weapons and competitive pressures were prevalent. Tensions between the region's three main tribes were heightened following Kenya's 1992 election. Soon after, violence broke out in the region, killing over 1200 people. Continued clan-based looting, rape, and murder created a sense of lawlessness in Wajir district.

After leaving a wedding ceremony early in order to avoid violence, the six women of Wajir began discussing ways to improve their situation. They discussed how the local market, a place which had traditionally been viewed as a sanctuary from violence, was now expressing these clan rivalries. Women began to refuse to sell to women from other clans. Disputes led to fights. Something had to be done. As explained by one of these six women, Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, "The problem had become explicitly ours. We women had no choice. If your house is on fire, what do you do? Sit and wait for someone else to extinguish it? No. You find a way to put the fire out." These women began to engage the issues in the market. They found that most women disliked these economically irrational patterns of behavior, and were willing to cooperate with a group of women comprised of members of each clan. Thus, the Wajir Women Association for Peace (WWAP) was created. It began with a simple mission: to ensure that all had equal access to a safe market. Whenever disputes or arguments arose, members would quickly bring the parties together and discuss the problem.

But it couldn't stop there. Once the market had become peaceful again, the group decided that it was necessary to

figure out a means to extend this sanctuary into other parts of the community. Members of WWAP decided that the leading elders, some of whom were known warlords, must be convinced to unite in a similar fashion. In a patriarchal society characterized by persistent warfare, this was certainly no small task for a group of women. It is at this point where the position of women in Somali society and the specific makeup of the group provided direction. As women in this society often marry outside of their individual sub-clans, in many cases, it is often their father and their brothers fighting their husband and their sons.

Furthermore, as natural intermediaries with connections and associations to all of the regional clans, a small number of women were able to assemble the 30 most important elders in the region. During this meeting, members of WWAP asked a highly respected elder from the smallest clan to open discussion. While the women patiently watched, the elder began a speech that, as Dekha explained, "had everyone somewhere between embarrassment and tears." The elders then agreed upon the need to work toward peaceful relations, and soon thereafter formed the Council of Elders for Peace. Members from this group routinely met at highly populated areas such as the mosques or town centers and spoke of the need to end violence. Following the example of the women in the market, the elders formed what was later called "rapid response teams" from which these respected and well connected leaders would move to the source of the conflict in a moments notice in order to negotiate settlements.

"The problem had become explicitly ours. We women had no choice. If your house is on fire, what do you do? Sit and wait for someone else to extinguish it? No. You find a way to put the fire out."

And it couldn't stop there, either. What was initially a group of six women multiplied into an umbrella of interconnected peace groups, each with a distinct function. Although the efforts in the market and in the town centers were important, as long as the armed youths still resided in the bush, jobless, little progress could be made. Soon, Youth for Peace Groups were born. Their mission was to convince youths to trade their guns for jobs. In order to do this, peace workers connected with local business. The doors of the Youth Polytechnic were reopened, offering educational opportunities to former soldiers. In 1996, members from each of the peace groups met with political

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# Stabilizing Somalia: A Multi-Faceted Approach

By Beth Tuckey, Associate Director

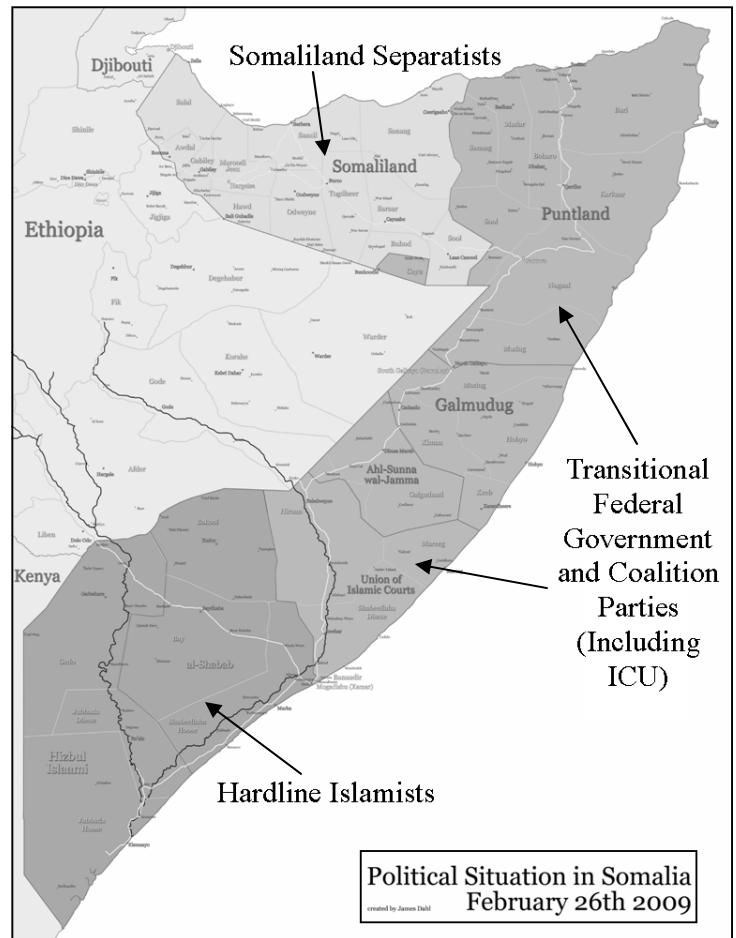
In mid-April, AFJN analyzed the piracy situation off the coast of Somalia in hopes that we could raise a side of the story that had yet to permeate the media bubble. In essence, we argue that the roots of the piracy situation are in part linked to irresponsible actions by international fishing trawlers off the Somali coast. By overfishing and dumping toxic waste into the ocean, these companies deprive fishermen of their livelihoods and children of their health, thereby prompting civilian retaliation in the form of piracy. Although we recognize piracy as a crime, these underlying factors have given young men few other alternatives. Yet, as difficult as the piracy situation is, it is only one piece of the broader Somalia challenge. At AFJN, we recognize the need to take a multi-pronged approach to peace in the Horn of Africa.

True stability in Somalia must feel like a pipe dream to Somalis who have watched the repeated transfers of power, the increasing number of militia groups, and the internationally-backed invasions by Ethiopia. Many Somalis attest that the most stable period – the “golden era” as they called it – was right before the U.S.-Ethiopian invasion in 2006 when the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) held control over Mogadishu.

Today, the ICU has splintered into different groups, most notably among them the extremist al-Shabaab sect. Al-Shabaab became increasingly powerful as anti-Ethiopian and anti-American sentiment grew during Ethiopia’s two-year occupation of the country. Significantly, not all al-Shabaab members are hardliners and it may be possible to forge peaceful relations between certain members of the group and the current government, leaving the extreme fighters marginalized.

The answers to Somalia’s piracy and militia problems ultimately lie within the government, although outside actors such as the United States and the United Nations can also play a more positive role. President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed took office after the elections in January, replacing his more narrow-minded predecessor, Abdullahi Yusuf, in the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Sharif is currently also the Commander of the ICU, and was one of the primary leaders of the movement over the past several years. This position gives him broad public support at home as well as the ability to engage with other sects of the ICU. Sharif is also considered a moderate, which has won him respect from the Obama Administration.

In shaping U.S. policy toward Somalia, the best advice may be for the Obama Administration to lay low in its diplomatic engagement, but also to be supportive of the evolution of a stronger government within Somalia. The tenuous situation in which Sharif finds himself demands that he not be considered a ‘staunch ally’ of the U.S. nor a foe. This will give him room to find those within al-Shabaab



and other sects who are willing to work with the TFG to build stability within the country. If anything, the United States should have learned its lesson – that interference in Somalia, particularly military interference, is disastrous for the people. The biggest help may be to stay out of Somalia while also giving Sharif the nudges he needs to build the diplomatic and development capacity of the country.

Once the TFG in Somalia gains ground, Somali-led efforts at development must begin in earnest. One of the reasons al-Shabaab continues to find recruits is that there are few

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## Advocating for Water: Results of a Grassroots Survey

By Rocco Puopolo, *s.x.*, Executive Director

In the fall of 2008, the Extractive Industries Sub-Group of the DC-based Religious Working Group on Water, of which AFJN is a member, conducted a non-scientific, trilingual survey of the presence and impact of extractive industries on water quality for local communities worldwide. We received sixty five responses from around the world, including AFJN members in Lesotho, Nigeria, Malawi, Zambia, DR Congo, and Chad.

Some of the major findings of the study show that there is a grave lack of regulations over multinational industries involved in mineral and resource extraction, no effective governmental oversight, and too few inspectors to insure

Training and education surfaced as the advocacy method in which respondents most frequently engaged. Letters to the editor, policy advocacy, public hearings, and mass demonstrations are all mentioned as methods for advocating for improvements. Many groups have also attempted to contact and persuade public and corporate officials to be more responsible stewards of the earth's resources. Neighborhood assemblies, spiritual retreats, prayer pilgrimages, and a variety of organizations ranging from the Transformation Resource Center in Lesotho (Southern Africa) to the Christian Base Communities in El Salvador (Central America) provide venues for solidarity and exchange.

The overall response to the survey indicates serious concerns over the negative impact of extractive mining industries on community water supplies, but also that creative approaches to solving the problem do exist. Many communities are recommending actions such as finding alternative employment opportunities, listening to local people, countering media campaigns of industries promising better jobs, and helping people make the global/local connections. One respondent described an effective strategy from a U.S. perspective:

“More than three-quarters of respondents indicated their water source had been adversely affected by the extractive industries operating in their communities. In several areas, the water is reported to be indefinitely polluted...”

that water used by industries would later be made safe for drinking. Some respondents indicated that there may be adequate laws and policies, but that they are not enforced or are enforced arbitrarily.

Health concerns, access to water supply, quality of water supply, and environmental impact were all rated as extremely important by at least 75% of the respondents. The impact on the environment, particularly by mining, was the number one concern of 82%. One responded, “Mining destroys the environment, including wildlife.” Closely related is a concern about the actual quality of water: “Gold mining pollutes surface and underground waters.”

In addition to the quality of water, availability of water is of concern to respondents. More than three-quarters of respondents indicated their water source had been adversely affected by the extractive industries operating in their communities. In several areas, the water is reported to be indefinitely polluted because of its exposure to uranium ore. Toxic water causes physical defects in children and deaths due to cancer, thyroid disease, and diabetes.

- Be alert about what is happening in the halls of power and respond immediately when action is required;
- Be armed with the facts and gather experts in the field around you to help focus attention where it is most needed;
- Be reasonable in approach;
- Insist that the media make the whole truth known, and if they don't, do so in well-crafted letters to the editor that inform the public;
- Discover who in the government has the responsibility for public interest and address that person/group through the proper channels. Take a small group of people/voters who will represent the cause well and authoritatively;
- The intelligence of the people and their expertise often outruns those with bureaucratic power. Network and journey together.

(“WATER” continued on page 7)

## Connecting the Church in Africa and the Church in the U.S.

The website 'Yes, Africa Matters' is up and running! This initiative is the work of the Catholic Task Force for Africa, a Washington-based group of advocates who come together monthly to share our work, passion, and perspective with each other on behalf of our many constituents who are working for justice and peace in Africa. We would like to thank Jay Carney, a CTFA member and professor of African Studies and Theology for starting it off.

We use the occasion of the Second Special Assembly for Africa, popularly known as the Second African Synod of Bishops, to offer you this website. The theme of the upcoming Synod is "The Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice, and peace: You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world." This theme could not be closer to our hearts.

As an exercise in solidarity with the Church in Africa that we know and love, we provide this website as a one-stop shop. We have offered some background on the connections that exist between our churches and peoples, our shared values, and the many partnerships and twinning relationships that bind us. We have a sense that no one really knows just how many links there are between local churches here in the USA and the many in Africa. But we hope that those who surf the web may add their connections to this so that we can have a better sense of how we are related Church to Church.

We list the many missionary communities that are present in Africa. If you find that your community is not listed, let us know and we will add it to the list. There is a section that focuses on the Synod itself, and we hope to receive and share reflections from the continent as we together pray for the gift of the Spirit that will grace this assembly. We link also to the United States Conference of Catholic

Bishops (USCCB) office of Migration that has an extensive study on the African and Caribbean diaspora here in the USA that grace our churches. There are also resources and links with universities and other advocacy groups that can help you understand and engage with Africa.

With this website we hope to put flesh on the two feet of Catholic Social Outreach: informing people of ways to exercise direct service/outreach to those in need as well as advocacy for systemic social change.

Put simply, we believe that Yes, Africa Matters. The more we know and the more we share can only strengthen that belief. If you have an additional contribution that we may have missed in our research, do send it to me ([director@afjn.org](mailto:director@afjn.org)). If you wish to comment on our work, please do. So, check out [www.yesafricamatters.org](http://www.yesafricamatters.org)!

—Rocco Puopolo, s.x., AFJN Executive Director



International Young Christian Students outside the Basilica Church of the Uganda Martyrs near Kampala.

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and economic leaders, forming the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC). The WPDC would be located within a governmental institution. These efforts allowed the peace groups to retain local autonomy while providing for national support and coordination. On nearly every level of society in Wajir, peace groups were created and in constant dialogue. The seeds of a sustainable peace were sown.

In many ways, with the rising food prices, the effects of Kenya's latest elections, and the continued state failure in

Somalia, the context surrounding Wajir today is similar to that of 1991. Although sustainable, their peace is undoubtedly vulnerable. Dekha explains that "Peace is not an event, an end, but...peace is the way, though the journey is long and the road winding and difficult." The story of Wajir may be recognized as a roadmap for this journey, a map that may direct and inspire not only women, but all who seek to begin or participate in grassroots change. AFJN's project on restorative justice aims to amplify these types of peacebuilding projects. When speaking of Africa, it is easy to focus only on the failures. Let us not forget the power and potential of six dedicated Kenyan women.

(“SOMALIA” continued from page 4)

opportunities for income in Somalia. This of course instigates a self-perpetuating cycle of violence and poverty. It is important that the international community does what it can to repair the damage done during years of foreign-backed war without undermining the government and local leaders in rebuilding their own economy, education system, health care system, and other development needs.

The much-publicized piracy situation can be partly resolved by strengthening the government, though not entirely. Laws must be enacted to prohibit international fishing companies from depleting Somalia’s fisheries.

“Once the [Transitional Federal Government] in Somalia gains ground, Somali-led efforts at development must begin in earnest.

This could be done by limiting the number of trawling vessels that can pass through the waters off Somalia’s coast, in addition to spreading awareness in Europe and Asia about the harmful effects of over-fishing, thereby decreasing consumer demand. International governments and companies should also provide support for Somalis living in coastal villages in the form of new fishing boats and healthcare for those affected by toxic

waste. It must be clearly understood that piracy will not be resolved by the presence of more naval ships or by putting weapons on ships carrying food aid. These may be stop-gap measures to make shipping companies feel safer, but they will not counter the roots of the piracy problem.

AFJN will continue to develop its Somalia policy and invites you to offer your insights. The situation is incredibly complex, and although the U.S. has had a hand in Somalia’s current state of disarray, Somalis must also take it upon themselves to form a stable state. We can continue to castigate the U.S. for the past, but we must also encourage Somalia to build its government and meanwhile prohibit foul actions by outside forces. At the time of writing, the BBC reports that Ethiopian troops are once again taking up positions in Somalia and that violence in Mogadishu is escalating. Ethiopia should be pressured to stand down its forces, to focus on its own protection, and to allow Sheikh Sharif to begin the difficult task of diplomacy and development in Somalia.

(“WATER” continued from page 5)

The above-cited responses show how much needs to be done to establish a sustainable relationship with the earth and its scarce resources of fresh water.

AFJN, through participation in this working group, advocated for inclusion of 20 African countries in the reauthorization of the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act in the last Congress which meant extending \$125 M to those countries for water and sanitation projects. Through this survey and its results, we will have data to address water issues that may come up as the Foreign Assistance Reform process proceeds in the new Congress.

### AFJN Continues to Focus on Restorative Justice

On May 14th, AFJN Staff Members Bahati Jacques and Beth Tuckey presented their research on restorative justice in Uganda and Burundi at the National Conference on Restorative Justice in San Antonio, TX.

They submitted a paper entitled “*Promoting International Support for Community-Based Justice Mechanisms in Post-Conflict Burundi and Uganda*,” which will be made available on our website soon.

**Paper Abstract:**  
 Those who committed crimes in the long wars in Burundi and Uganda are wanted by the both the national and international criminal court system, but comparatively little attention is given to peacebuilding, reconciliation, or restoration of the communities destroyed by violence. Local justice mechanisms, however, tend to emphasize community restoration. For example, the reconciliation process of *Mato Oput*, an Acholi tradition in Northern Uganda, and *Ubushingantahe*, a tradition in Burundi, uniquely achieve healing of the concerned parties in a way that a formal justice system cannot. For this paper, interviews with both victims and perpetrators of crime, as well as implementers of restorative justice programs were conducted in Burundi and Uganda. Using this local perspective, the authors elevate the need for international recognition and support for restorative justice mechanisms in post-conflict communities in Africa. As advocates for a more equitable U.S.-Africa policy, Africa Faith & Justice Network will use this research to promote a restorative justice approach to U.S. foreign assistance.

**The Africa Faith and Justice Network**, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, educates and advocates for just relations with Africa.

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