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Examining the Role of Rwanda in the DRC Insurgency

House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights
U.S. Rep. Christopher H. Smith, Chairman
September 19, 2012
2172 Rayburn House Office Building

Good morning. Today's hearing will examine U.S. policy toward Rwanda following the release on June 26th of a United Nations report confirming Rwanda's support of rebels who have ravaged the provinces of North and South Kivu in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, or DRC. In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide until the issuance of this report, the international community declined to comment on Rwanda's interventions in the DRC. We need to better understand the devastation caused by these interventions and gauge how the United States can play a helpful role in bringing this crisis to an end.

Unfortunately, our previously scheduled Administration witnesses – Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson and USAID Assistant Administrator for the Bureau of Africa Earl Gast – are unable to testify this morning due to events in the world involving heightened security for U.S. embassies and aid missions. This would have been an opportunity to present a full statement of the Administration position on what has happened in the DRC and what needs to be done to more effectively address the root causes of the ongoing conflict there. We expect that they will be available to speak publicly on these matters at a later date.

Meanwhile, we have a distinguished private panel that will be more than able to shed light on the crisis in the DRC, as well as Rwanda's involvement in the ongoing rebellion in eastern DRC. The crisis in the DRC is both tragic and complex, and the ethnic cleavages have developed over more than a century, although they have been heightened in recent decades. The first significant recorded influx into the DRC of Rwandan Tutsis and Hutus dates back to the 1880s.

Other ethnic groups in DRC (then known as Zaire) began to fear the influence of the Rwandans, especially in the East. The Hutu-Tutsi conflict in Rwanda led to the 1994 genocide

there, but Hutu-Tutsi animosity also spilled over into the DRC. Hutu militiamen, who fled Rwanda after the genocide, have repeatedly attacked Rwanda, and fighting involving Tutsis and Hutus inside the DRC have terrorized the inhabitants of the eastern part of the country.

As one of our witnesses today, Congolese Bishop Ntambo Ntanda, will tell us, six million people have lost their lives in the DRC as a result of recurring conflict. Far from resolving ethnic disputes, the interventions by Rwanda in the DRC have exacerbated tensions among the ethnic groups who live there.

In the wake of activity by Rwandan troops or militias that they create or support, Tutsi and Hutu people living in the DRC have become targets as a result. Rwanda has been engaged in armed intervention in the DRC for at least 17 years. If this is the most successful method to halt cross-border attacks into Rwanda by Hutu rebels operating from DRC territory, why is there continued devastation in the region? Why do Tutsis and Hutus living in the DRC seem more hated today than they have been previously?

During the summer of 2008, the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), a Congolese rebel group, reportedly was backed secretly by Rwanda. It was initially led by Tutsi General Laurent Nkunda, an indicted war criminal. A March 23, 2009, agreement between the DRC and Rwanda led to the arrest of Nkunda, but replaced him with Bosco Ntaganda, even then a suspected war criminal for whom the International Criminal Court (ICC) had issued an arrest warrant in 2006. When the CNDP judged that DRC President Joseph Kabila had broken the 2009 accord, Ntaganda led a mutiny that named itself M23 for date of the broken agreement and began a reign of terror in eastern DRC.

In June of this year, a United Nations Group of Experts report confirmed that Rwandan Defense Minister James Kabarebe and other top Rwandan military officers played a central role in organizing, funding and arming the mutineers in eastern DRC. The report also stated that Rwandan military officers engaged in efforts to convince Congolese businessmen, politicians and former rebels that had joined the Congolese army to join the M23 mutiny in order to wage “a new war to obtain a secession of both Kivus.” The report further charged that Rwanda was protecting Ntaganda from arrest. Meanwhile, Nkunda remains in Rwanda – immune from prosecution for his crimes.

Aside from ethnic divisions and allegations of breach of faith in agreements, another source of conflict has been the abundant mineral wealth in DRC, including 70% of the world’s coltan (used to make vital components of cell phones and other electronic equipment), 30% of the world’s diamond reserves and vast deposits of cobalt, copper and bauxite. The UN report stated that rebels in the East export precious minerals for profit to fund their continuing mayhem and that Rwandan officials also were benefiting from DRC’s mineral wealth.

We hold this hearing today to begin the process of finding a way to address the factors that have caused Rwanda’s armed intervention in hopes that the U.S. Government can offer a lasting solution to the long crisis in the DRC.