The Role of Track Two Diplomacy in the Democratic Republic of Congo Conflict

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Abstract

Negotiating a cease-fire and a political solution, at the top political and military level, was an obvious first priority for peace-brokers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) conflict. A flurry of first track and official diplomatic efforts were pursued with the aim of convincing the Kabila government, rebel movements and regional states, to negotiate and implement a cease-fire agreement. Track two diplomacy played a minimal role in facilitating the signing of a cease-fire agreement. It, however, served as a reconciliatory effort at the civil society level. Track two diplomacy made a critical contribution to the official peace process by providing the unarmed actors with an opportunity to voice their position on the conflict. The *de facto* partitioning of the country during the war made contact between civil society organisations from the occupied zones difficult, if not impossible. Unofficial track two diplomatic efforts conducted outside the DRC served to provide civil society groups with a platform of interaction and engagement. These exercises

allowed the unarmed forces to achieve greater co-ordination of their programmes and an opportunity to organise themselves into a stronger voice.

Introduction

At the outbreak of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on 2 August 1998, it was generally acknowledged that a military outcome would not produce the lasting peace required for the reconstruction of the country. A capture of Kinshasa by the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) rebels would only have precipitated another rebellion against themselves, creating a cycle of violence and destruction. Given the foreseeable consequences of a military "solution", governments in Africa and abroad urged all parties engaged in the war to enter into negotiations and find a political solution to the conflict.

The number of summits, heads of state meetings and shuttle missions between governments and special envoys, have been a clear indication of the importance allocated to the official or track one level of a diplomatic solution to the DRC crisis. Over time these official efforts made significant gains in advancing the peace process. These included the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (LA), the appointment of a mediator for the Inter-Congolese Dialogue and the implementation of the United Nations Observer Mission to the Congo (MONUC).

The role and impact of track two diplomacy in achieving a cease-fire was, however, minimal. There have been various reasons for this outcome. Firstly, the nature of the conflict required that track one efforts be given first priority. Secondly, the complexity of the war did not allow for a speedy, track one or track two, diplomatic solution. As noted by many analysts, there were no "quick-fix" solutions to the DRC imbroglio. Thirdly, given the scale of the conflict, an intensive track one process proceeded without any co-ordination with a track two process. Put differently, track two initiatives in the DRC conflict did not enjoy the support of the official track one level. Fourthly, co-ordination among the various track two efforts could have produced a greater impact. As a result many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) directed resources to the same objective. Finally, the capacity of non-state actors to undertake a track two process is still undeveloped.

However, since official track one diplomacy focused solely on the belligerents, track two efforts provided the Congolese civil society and

unarmed opposition with a platform to articulate a presence and negotiate an inclusion into the peace process. This was achieved by providing an opportunity for the Congolese unarmed actors to present their position and thinking on the conflict. As a result, track two diplomatic initiatives in the DRC conflict led to frank and constructive discussions between the different civil society groups that served to harmonise relations amongst themselves. In addition the various efforts or activities that could be defined as track two diplomacy, contributed substantially to a global awareness on the issues and dynamics of the conflict. In other words, track two diplomacy resulted in the dissemination of information on the DRC crisis through fora of dialogue, conferences and public meetings, which undoubtedly changed uninformed perceptions of the problem.

Track Two Diplomacy: A concept

The term "track two" diplomacy was first used in 1981 by Joseph Montville in his search for a term that encompassed the unofficial efforts made outside governments which brought about a diplomatic resolution of conflicts (Lee 1997:1). Montville felt a need to define or label the distinction between action which was government to government and that which was people to people. In its original conception, "track two" or "citizen" diplomacy refers to private citizens discussing issues that are usually reserved for official negotiations.

Track two diplomacy transcends the narrow power-based approaches of traditional diplomacy by replacing the nation state, as the primary referent of conflict, with all interest groups. In other words, instead of only having favourable discussions based on strategic interests with just heads of state, a fundamental characteristic of track one missions, track two diplomacy seeks to include all parties to the conflict.

According to Jos Havermans (1999:222), track two differs from track one diplomacy in that:

> it perceives its role as being part of a process of developing mutual understanding between larger groups of people, whereas track one diplomacy tends to limit its focus to the narrower world of the politician. Track two tries to make its impact felt on the entirety of what it describes as identity groups: namely, communities that share a certain ethnic, regional, national, socio-economic or other identity. Rather than just trying to inspire politicians to make decisions based on rational evaluation of options and interests, track two diplomacy seeks to help all the people involved to change their way of thinking.

The concept of track two diplomacy stems from the belief that war can be avoided if contacts between people are initiated to build linkages of friendship and understanding. Different methods are used to bring people together in an attempt to produce changes in the way they view themselves, the conflict and possible solutions to the conflict. In this way track two diplomacy can contribute to conflict transformation by encouraging those involved in disputes to engage in constructive dialogue. Such an approach requires the techniques of bargaining and negotiation that are usually used at the track one level to be adapted for the engagements between citizens of different political positions. Track two diplomacy, therefore, entails processes such as problem-solving workshops, dialogues, cultural exchanges and basically any other contacts established between people that are engaged in a conflict. These techniques pose a challenge for second track practitioners who have neither acquired such skills nor developed them appropriately.

Although track two diplomacy is usually conducted with two or more parties to a conflict, it may also be aimed, initially, at working with only one party in an effort to achieve a proper understanding of that group's position in the conflict. Working with one party can be useful in facilitating group cohesiveness where individuals become marginalised by members of their own ethnic or religious group.

Track two diplomacy, being a new concept and still very embryonic, needs to be formalised as a process. According to Michael Lee (1997:1), the "notion of track two diplomacy was expanded into four separate tracks: professional conflict resolution, exchanges between private citizens, the actions of the business community, and international broadcasting". But as noted by Lee, these distinctions soon became inadequate. As a result four more categories were devised by Louise Diamond to give rise to the term of "multi-track diplomacy". As a result the use of various tracks by different scholars and practitioners, has not allowed for a concrete or clear conceptualisation of track two diplomacy.

The emergence and value of Track Two Diplomacy

The end of the Cold War has produced an ongoing discourse on the need to reconceptualise security. Accompanied by this new outlook on security, there has been the need to review the effectiveness of traditional agents of security, namely states and their governments. In other words, the ability of states and governments to play a meaningful role in resolving conflict had to be

re-examined. Subsequently, the role and effectiveness of non-state actors in promoting peace and security has received increasing attention in recent years.

The role of non-state actors and NGOs (like World Vision, Save the Children and Greenpeace) in facilitating human security in the realm of humanitarian aid, disaster relief and environmental degradation is well known. NGOs have for a long time provided economic and humanitarian assistance to people affected by war around the world. However, as John McDonald (1991:201) has observed, most forms of humanitarian aid have "done little to resolve the root causes of conflict". There has therefore been a need to examine the capacity of non-state actors and NGOs to serve as agents in conflict resolution and peace building.

Official track one diplomacy has been viewed as a "power-based, formal and often rigid form of official interaction between instructed representatives of sovereign nations" (McDonald 1991:201-202). Furthermore, track one diplomatic efforts can be easily interpreted as meddling in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. Under such circumstances where official diplomatic communications between the warring parties can easily break down, unofficial channels can be an effective strategy to resume dialogue and interaction needed for a resolution to the conflict.

Track two diplomacy as a non-governmental, informal and unofficial form of conflict resolution has the potential to reduce the propensity for protracted conflict by improving communication and encouraging a common ground among the warring sides. The value of pursuing unofficial contacts between people on opposing sides is that they have the capacity of de-escalating a conflict before any official negotiations can attempt to do so. Intrastate conflicts are also perceived to be handled more readily by unofficial interventions.

Contemporary acceptance of the need for track two diplomacy is also based on the change in the nature of conflicts. Conflicts around the world are increasingly the result of internal disputes "in which governments are just one of the actors involved" (Havermans 1999:223). In this context, it makes little sense to deal with governments alone. Instead interaction with other groups (such as rebel groups, local leaders and community-based organisations) is required.

The DRC conflict involved, however, more than just the internal actors of the country. Eight regional states were initially drawn into the war. In addition, a new rebel movement, the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC), was

launched while the RCD rebels split into the RCD-Goma and RCD-ML groups. Mediating in the DRC conflict required, therefore, interaction with a number of both internal and external actors. As a result of the numerous actors involved in the war, the official track one peace process became increasingly complex.

Indeed, track two diplomacy should not be viewed as a replacement for track one efforts, but rather as a complementary process that provides a preparatory phase for successful negotiations. As a pre-negotiation instrument, track two efforts could provide crucial information to pave the way for a peaceful settlement. Nevertheless, "most experts in the field believe that its potential has not been fully used" (Havermans 1999:223). In general, track two diplomacy can be most effective when linked to the official peace process at government level. However unless governments are willing to invest in alternatives to track one approaches, track two and unofficial peacemaking will suffer from insufficient funding and limited human resources.

In spite of track two diplomacy being a fairly recent practice, it has been able to record some successes. A classic example is the contribution made by the Community of Sant'Egidio in achieving a peaceful settlement in Mozambique. When negotiations bogged down because of disagreement on the process and location for the talks, the Sant'Egidio Community hosted exploratory talks that turned into a formal mediation. The Rome-based organisation known for its role in conflict resolution and unofficial diplomacy acted as facilitators or mediators outside the framework of traditional diplomacy. The Sant'Egidio Community steered the warring parties along a path of peace and reconciliation which culminated in the signing of the Mozambique Peace Agreement in October 1992, which gave rise to the country's first democratic elections two years later.

The Oslo peace process is another example of the success of track two diplomacy. "It was a long-term process with adequate time spent on building trust between all the parties involved in negotiations. It was not public and maintained a high level of confidentiality" (Mitchell 1993:8). While the national leadership received the international recognition for the historic signing of the Oslo accords on the White House lawn, these agreements could not have been produced if it were not for the initiative of non-official second track diplomacy by the "Fagbevelgelsens Fosknings Organisasjon" (FAFO – in English, the Institute for Applied Social Science) in Norway. Even though the middle east conflict has not totally been resolved, the Israelis and Palestinians who worked covertly in Oslo to produce the framework for the

current peace process represent a prominent example of the role of second track diplomacy in conflict resolution.

The nature of the DRC conflict: Complexities for a track one settlement

Official track one diplomacy failed to produce a lasting peace in the DRC, primarily because of the nature of the conflict and the enormity of the crisis. Shortly after the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) captured Kinshasa in May 1997, the new "president", Laurént Kabila, clamped down on political rights, banned political activities and failed to install an effective transitional government. The internal political opposition responded by embarking on a non-violent struggle for the removal of Kabila. Represented by political groups like the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), the internal unarmed opposition in the DRC had little input on the track one peace process that led to the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (LA).

Official diplomatic efforts focused exclusively on the "official belligerents" in the war, namely the Kabila government, the rebel movements and the external armed forces, leaving little room for the Congolese unarmed actors (Naidoo 2000:9). Even the Mai-Mai, an internal armed group, was excluded from formal peace talks and cease-fire negotiations, despite being party to the conflict. Although the conflict had clear domestic roots, it was the external or regional dimension to the crisis that attracted a huge track one diplomatic process.

Kabila's rise to power was based on his being the front man of a regional military intervention (led by Rwanda and Uganda) that aimed to replace the Mobutu regime with a government that would ensure their national security and economic interests. However, a few months after he declared himself president, Kabila attempted to "consolidate his regime by expelling the Rwandan troops that brought him to power" (Turner 2000:1). It was this dismissal of the Rwandese soldiers that triggered the launch of the "second rebellion".

The Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) rebels comprising former Mobutu soldiers (the Zairean armed Forces – FAZ), "Banyamulenge" troops that were part of the AFDL, and long-standing academic opponents of Mobutu, launched a revolt to overthrow Kabila with the direct support of Rwandan, Ugandan and Burundian troops. The internal armed rebellion, led by the RCD, accused Kabila of dictatorship, corruption, nepotism and

fomenting the genocide of Tutsis in the DRC. The military supporters of the RCD, representative of an external dimension to the conflict, charged Kabila with regional instability because of his support for rebel groups that were in armed combat with their governments. The RCD rebels with their military backers made rapid advances toward Kinshasa before being stopped by Kabila's allies. Reacting in the name of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Angolan, Namibian and Zimbabwean troops rushed to Kabila's rescue and prevented what otherwise would have been an easy overthrow of the new Congolese government.

The external dimension to this conflict in producing an inter-state battle with the direct involvement of eight African states increased the enormity and complexity of the crisis. Resulting in what analysts described as "Africa War I", the "second rebellion" in the DRC assumed an unprecedented magnitude for two inter-related reasons. Firstly, the DRC was a battleground for the internal disputes of six neighbouring countries. They were the conflicts between: the MPLA government of Angola and the UNITA rebel movement; the minority Tutsi government in Burundi and the pro-Hutu rebels of the Forces for the Defence of Democracy (FDD) and the National Liberation Forces (FNL); the Sassou Nguesso government of Congo-Brazzaville and militias backing the ousted president Pascal Lissouba and his ally, the former prime minister, Bernard Kolelas; the Rwandese government of Paul Kagame and the ex-FAR and Interahamwe that were responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide; the Museveni government in Uganda and the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF); and the Sudanese government and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

Secondly the conflict in the DRC provided an opportunity for inter-state hostilities, produced by these domestic disputes, to be unleashed. The conflict between Sudan and Uganda illustrates this argument clearly. The governments of Sudan and Uganda went to war because of each one's support for the rebel movements that were trying to oust the other. Simply put, Uganda supported the SPLA because Khartoum backed the LRA and ADF rebels. Sudan, therefore, rallied to the support of Kabila, because its enemy, Uganda, was at war with the DRC government. During that time Rwanda and Uganda assisted the UNITA rebels in transportation of military hardware and the sale of diamonds, because Angola was backing Kinshasa. In other words, the military "logic" of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend", was readily employed in the "second rebellion" to magnify the conflict into a seemingly irresolvable proportion.

The formation of the a new rebel group, the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC), two months after the war began, and the rise of splinter factions among the rebel forces only served to increase the parties to the conflict at the expense of compounding the task of the peace brokers to this conflict. Given the numerous parties involved in the war, track one mediation efforts were restricted to just the major belligerents with an exclusion of the armed rebels of neighbouring countries and the local Mai-Mai militia. As a result, peace in the DRC remained elusive with the neighbouring rebel groups continuing with sporadic skirmishes and attacks against their opponents.

The scale of the conflict produced by the external or regional dimension of the "second rebellion" warranted the focus on an intensive track one process, especially by African governments, in an effort to produce "an African solution to an African problem". The main track one initiatives that aimed to attain the cessation of hostilities and an agreement by the warring sides to participate in negotiations that would lead to a political settlement were:

The South Africa initiative

On 23 August 1998, at an urgent SADC summit in Pretoria, former South African President Nelson Mandela, then chairman of the SADC, was mandated to organise a cease-fire in consultation with the OAU Secretary-General (Bokala 1998:7). However, Mandela's mediation efforts were said to have been constrained by disagreement with Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe, on who should head the SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security that was used to authorise the military intervention in support of Kabila.

The Organisation of African Unity initiative

On 10 September 1998, the OAU hosted a meeting of ministers in Addis Ababa during which a draft cease-fire agreement was formulated. That agreement, though agreed to in principle by the belligerents, was never signed.

The Lusaka peace initiative

On 13 September 1998 at the annual SADC summit in Mauritius, Zambian President Frederick Chiluba was mandated to lead the mediation efforts, assisted by Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa and

Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano. This initiative, which became known as the Lusaka peace process, drafted "modalities" for the implementation of a political settlement which culminated in the signing of a cease-fire agreement at the heads of state summit on 10 July 1999 in the Zambian capital, Lusaka. The Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (LA) made provisions for:

- The cessation of hostilities and the disengagement of armed forces;
- The orderly withdrawal of all foreign troops;
- The appointment of a facilitator for an all-inclusive inter-Congolese political negotiation;
- The deployment of a United Nations (UN) Peace-keeping force;
- The disarmament of armed groups from neighbouring countries; and
- The formation of a national army.

Although the LA was thwarted by renewed hostilities and fraught with implementation difficulties, it remained the most formidable basis to resolve the crisis in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

The Sirte agreement

On 18 April 1999, the Libyan president, Muammar Gaddafi, brokered a peace agreement between Museveni and Kabila, which was also signed by the Presidents of Chad and Eritrea. Signed in the Libyan town of Sirte, the agreement called for the withdrawal of foreign forces from the DRC. Chad, subsequently, withdrew its troops from the country and Libya sent some 40 military personnel to Uganda to prepare for the deployment of a proposed neutral African peacekeeping force provided for under the Sirte agreement.

The United Nations "month of Africa"

On 24 January 2000, at the UN Security Council special session on Africa, a day-long meeting was devoted to the war in the DRC. The objective of the session was to get the warring sides to reaffirm their commitment to the LA and agree on an immediate end to cease-fire violations. It was for the first time that heads of state of parties in the DRC conflict addressed the UN Security Council.

The various mediation attempts undertaken at the Pretoria, SADC, and Organisation of African Unity (OAU) summits, as well as a number of individual efforts by personalities like presidents Mandela and Chissano, had all

run into formidable obstacles. The main ones were:

- The attainment of an agreement over which parties should be acknowledged as belligerents;
- The attainment of an agreement on cease-fire talks and the direct involvement of the rebels in these negotiations;
- The stalling of the peace process by a crumbling of strategic alliances;
- The choice of a mediator for an all-inclusive internal dialogue;
- The implementation problems experienced by the MONUC; and
- The sustainability of the war from the exploitation of the DRC natural resources, in particular its minerals.

The initial obstacle encountered by the track one diplomatic process was to get the many different actors to agree on being party to the conflict. From the start, Kabila refused to acknowledge the internal component of the rebellion and stood steadfast on his assertion that the conflict was solely an external invasion by Rwanda and Uganda. On the other side, the RCD rebels rejected talks with Kabila because of their expectation of a military victory. The rapid advances initially made by the RCD, together with their Rwandese supporters, convinced the rebels that a military victory was very possible. With such expectations the RCD rejected any negotiations with Kabila. At the same time Rwanda refused to admit that it had troops in the Congo. It took the intervention of former president Nelson Mandela to obtain an admission by the then vice-president, Paul Kagame, that Rwandese troops were in the DRC. Kagame's public admission in Pretoria that Rwanda was "one of the belligerent parties to the conflict meant he could take his place at the peace negotiations" (Hartley 1998:4).

A bigger obstacle for a resolution to the conflict arose from the fragmentation of strategic alliances among the rebels. In early 1999, differences over the inclusion of ex-Mobutuists in the RCD and a military strategy to legitimise and transform the rebellion created a division within the rebels that eventually stalled the peace process. The split in the RCD, which essentially pitted a camp led by Ernest Wamba dia Wamba against the ex-Mobutuists, culminated in the formation of the RCD-Goma and RCD-Kisangani (later named the RCD-ML [Liberation Movement]) factions. As a result, while heads of state signed the LA on 10 July 1999, the (RCD) rebels failed to do so. Both factions claimed to be the rightful representatives of the RCD and refused to acknowledge the signature of the other. After talks in Kampala between President Museveni, President Kagame and the South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, a compromise formula allowed

51 of the RCD's founding members to sign the agreement (IRIN 1999). This process took a month.

Moreover the split in the RCD led to a fallout between their military supporters, Rwanda and Uganda. The divide within the RCD served to consolidate their supporters' differences over the strategy used in their war against Kabila. The RCD-Kisangani faction, who preferred a negotiated settlement, acquired the support of the Ugandans whose strategy and approach was to mobilise and equip the Congolese to achieve an alternative leadership in the DRC. The RCD-Goma rebels in seeking to overthrow Kabila militarily were readily supported by the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) who was determined on a military solution.

The end of the military alliance between Rwanda and Uganda in the DRC conflict climaxed in two major armed clashes in the city of Kisangani during August 1999 and June 2000. In addition, the shifting of strategic alliances between Rwanda and Uganda compounded the track one diplomatic process. In August 1999, the South African Foreign Affairs Minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, flew to Kisangani in an attempt to broker a peace deal between friends that had turned enemies in a country whose government they were trying to oust (Matshikiza 1999:24). Resulting in a combined death toll of at least 1,500 people – mostly civilians – the military fallout between these former allies demonstrated the crippling affect which the fragmentation of strategic alliances has had on the DRC peace process.

Expectations that the signing of the LA would bring about an end to the war were not met because of continued violations of the agreement by all belligerents, which reduced the momentum of the peace process. A month after achieving the commitment from the heads of state at the UN's special millennium session on Africa to cease all violations, the Security Council authorised the deployment of 5,537 peacekeepers to the DRC as phase two of the MONUC. However, the belligerents' need to capture more territory and control strategic sites led to renewed clashes which brought an instant halt to the deployment of the peacekeepers. In an effort to further stall the peace process, the Kinshasa authorities announced that the MONUC would not be allowed to deploy armed peacekeepers or combat troops in territories under their control.

Even with an end to the cease-fire violations, the peace process faced another crucial obstacle. The inter-Congolese dialogue, provided for by the LA, had been threatened by the divorce of the DRC government from the

facilitator of the talks, former Botswana President Ketumile Masire. A statement made by Masire that he would proceed with the preparations of the dialogue without the Kabila government resulted in the facilitator being declared *persona non grata* by the latter. Mounting tensions between Kabila and Masire climaxed with the closure of the facilitator's Kinshasa office. Furthermore, on 24 July 2000 the DRC government announced that the inter-Congolese dialogue was no longer feasible or workable and that a Constituent Assembly established in August 2000 was the only appropriate place for the national talks.

Even if the agreement to proceed with the inter-Congolese dialogue was achieved, consensus on a venue for the talks was absent. For the Kabila government, it was vital that the talks took place in Kinshasa. However, all the armed rebels, political parties and most of civil society preferred a venue outside the DRC because of their security concerns. Furthermore an agreement on who should participate in the inter-Congolese dialogue was not attained. The inclusion of armed groups like the Mai-Mai had not been discussed since they were not part of the LA or any other formal agreement. Their inclusion in the dialogue was necessary given their armed resistance to the RCD rebels and Rwandese occupation of eastern Congo. Equally crucial was the disarmament and repatriation of those within the Interahamwe and the former Rwandan Armed Forces (ex-FAR) that are responsible for the 1994 genocide. It remained unclear as to who will undertake the disarmament and repatriation of the renegade militias and neighbouring rebel groups.

The evolution of a war economy in the DRC had become a major obstacle in resolving the conflict. The DRC's immense natural resources, in particular its mineral wealth, had been an incentive for the continued occupation of Congolese soil by the foreign armies. According to Chris Dietrich (2000:9) "the extraction of the resources of a country such as the DRC can provide rich pickings for those who, through the deployment of their armed forces can control and exploit mining ventures that they would otherwise not be able to access". Put simply, the economic benefits reaped from the war far outweighed those that might have been harvested from a political settlement.

Moreover, because time was required to exploit the DRC's resources in order to finance the war and allow individuals to accumulate personal wealth, a foreign troop withdrawal did not materialise after the signing of the LA. Therefore, the recourse to armed conflict and a war financed out of the revenues earned by the exploitation of the country's natural resources

presented a strong possibility of a *de facto* partitioning of the DRC into different occupied zones with an implosion into a state of generalised violence.

The nature and dynamics of the DRC conflict, therefore, did not allow for any speedy diplomatic solution. The difficulties in resolving the DRC conflict through track one diplomatic efforts invariably meant a minimal impact for track two initiatives.

Track Two Diplomacy in the DRC Conflict

In many cases, the role and impact that track two diplomacy has had on a peace process, is not very clear or easily determined. Nevertheless, since the unarmed political opposition and civil society groups were silenced by Kabila and sidelined by the official track one diplomatic process, track two efforts created a space for the Congolese unarmed forces to make a contribution to the official peace process by providing them with a platform to voice their position on the conflict.

In addition, track two efforts played a crucial role in publicising and expanding the existing knowledge of the "second rebellion" in the DRC. The various conferences, seminars and dialogues led to the dissemination of information on unexamined dynamics of the DRC crisis. Papers presented by academics, researchers and respected community leaders revealed information of the conflict which could not have been obtained from normal everyday news reports. Track two initiatives that attempted to bring the main warring sides to the negotiation table were unsuccessful due to the timing of the discussions and the lack of preliminary discussions.

For Havermans (1999:223) the activities of track two diplomats "vary from organising problem-solving workshops, acting as go-betweens to help set up a dialogue between antagonistic communities, offering mediation courses, organising seminars and conferences and private one-on-one diplomacy behind the scenes". Using this list of activities, several examples can be presented as track two efforts that were undertaken to contribute to a resolution of the DRC conflict.

The Montreal Conference for Durable Peace and Democratic Development in the DRC was undertaken to fulfil a task of enhancing the contribution and participation of Congolese civil society groups and the non-violent

democratic forces to the peace process. Held on 29 January 1999, the conference provided a platform for a broad spectrum of Congolese civil society organisations to participate in open and constructive dialogue among themselves and with the DRC government and the armed opposition groups. However, the failure of the Kabila government and the rebel movements to attend the gathering resulted in a conference with just the unarmed groups. It was perhaps premature to have expected that the warring sides would attend a gathering of this kind in the absence of an agreement by them to enter into peace talks. The conference, which was organised by the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, nevertheless played a significant role in informing the people and government of Canada of the fundamental causes to the conflict.

Another effort that tried to bring the mainstream belligerents to the negotiation table was undertaken by the Durban-based African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). A meeting convened by ACCORD brought together representatives of the RCD rebels, unarmed political parties, ministers from the Mobutu government, the Archbishop of Kisangani and a broad range of civil society groups. The frank and open discussions that emanated from the meeting, that took place in March 1999 at Pretoria, produced a consensus on many crucial issues and at the same time exposed the divergent perceptions and positions held by the various participants. However, once again, in the absence of the Kabila government, the meeting could not produce the preliminary talks by the warring sides that were required for obtaining an agreement to enter into negotiations. ACCORD was nevertheless satisfied with "narrowing the gap between the parties" (Laufer 1999:3).

In early 1999 the National Council of Development NGOs in Congo (CNONGD) launched a campaign for peace in the DRC when it organised a tour of civil society leaders to western countries, including Canada and Belgium. The aim of the campaign was to gain international support for an agreement on a cease-fire, the deployment of a peacekeeping force, an all-internal dialogue and the establishment of democratic institutions of governance. This intervention by DRC civil society was said to have contributed to President Kabila's announcement in April 1999 that he intended to organise a national debate between his government, the internal opposition and the broader civil society to seek a peaceful solution to the crisis. Although this so-called national debate had been confined to only

talks among people within Kabila's own ranks, the campaign by CNONGD, nevertheless, implied that Kabila could be influenced by the interventions of civil society.

Pope John Paul II and the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, in late November 1988, met with President Kabila in an effort to secure a commitment by the latter to hold talks with the rebels. During the same time, the Rome-based Sant'Egidio Community held talks with the DRC president to accomplish the same goal. In April 1999 it was announced that the Sant'Egidio Community managed to persuade the DRC government to take part in peace talks with the rebels that were scheduled to take place in Rome a month later. The talks were subsequently cancelled as the Lusaka peace process started to develop into a forum which brought the rebels, the Kabila government and foreign powers to the negotiating table. The Community, nevertheless, remained active and during the regional foreign affairs ministers meeting in Lusaka on 24 June 1999, Father Don Matteo Zuppi of the Sant'Egidio Community was recommended as one of the mediators for the inter-Congolese dialogue. However, both the RCD-Goma and MLC rebels rejected the mediation team as being pro-Kabila.

The formation of the Offices of the Goodwill Committee for the Facilitation of National Consensus was portrayed as an attempt to play a second track diplomatic role as "go-betweens" to help set up dialogue between the antagonistic parties. However, any meaningful contribution that the Committee could have made to the peace process was dogged by the credentials and status of its members. The Committee comprised former "Mobutuists" from the ranks of the security and intelligence departments. The Committee had barely commenced its facilitation when it came under fire for being a mere front to secure the return of its members to Kinshasa and to obtain from the Kabila government a release and recovery of their confiscated wealth. Many Congolese that suffered under Mobutu's rule argued that the Committee had no "moral right to embark on such a gigantic project, given their past political records and … should instead give back the money they had looted from the country" (Davies 1998:752).

This did not stop the Committee from operating as "go-betweens" and subsequently claiming to have facilitated the meeting between a DRC government delegation and the Ugandan authorities in Kampala in late May 1999 (Atundu-Liongo 1999). These talks held between the Ugandan Minister for Foreign Affairs, Amama Mbabazi, and the DRC team led by the Justice Minister, Mwenze Kongolo, produced a reaffirmation of their governments'

commitment to the Sirte accord, signed by Kabila and Museveni, in Libya, a month earlier.

Like the ACCORD meeting, most of the track two efforts attempted to address the conflict by focusing on interest groups from the DRC only. Given the external and regional dimension to the conflict an interaction between the internal interest groups of the various countries in the African Great Lakes region needed to take place. From 28 February to 4 March 2000 the Service for the Reinforcement of Assistance to Grassroots Communities in Central Africa (SERACOB) organised a meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, between civil society groups from Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda. In strengthening the capacity and role of civil society for the establishment of peace and security in the Great Lakes region, the meeting produced an Initiatives and Contacts Group (GIC) which was responsible for articulating the demands of the participants. Furthermore, the Nairobi meeting provided an opportunity for the representatives of the civil society groups from the occupied zones of the conflict to meet and interact, not only with each other, but also with those from the neighbouring countries of Rwanda and Burundi.

A similar meeting that focused on the external or regional dimension of the conflict was held in Zanzibar, Tanzania. A three-week *Seminar on Peace-Building in the Great Lakes Region*, that took place from 31 October 1999, was organised by the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution together with the Southern African Regional Institute for Policy Studies (SARIPS) and the Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI). According to the organiser, Arno Truger, the purpose of the seminar was to enhance a policy related discourse on mediation with the aim of elaborating relevant recommendations on peace-building in the Great Lakes Region.

On 29 February 2000 a more broadly represented discussion forum was organised by the religious groups of the DRC to find ways to bring peace to the war-torn country. These talks, labelled the "National Consultation", brought together 1,500 people including President Kabila, human rights activists, church leaders, and representatives of civil society and the rebel groups from the occupied zones. Security concerns, however, prevented a public announcement of the presence of the rebel delegation that numbered about 30. The discussions were expected to serve as preliminary talks to the inter-Congolese dialogue. Given that a political settlement of the conflict was only achievable if an agreement could have been reached at the inter-Congolese dialogue, preliminary talks were therefore crucial for consensus on key issues of the negotiations. In other words, "the main goal was to get

various political tendencies in the DRC to arrive at some sort of consensus, so that when the inter-Congolese dialogue does occur, they will be ready for reconciliation" (Kambale 2000:2).

The consensus and agreement produced by the talks at the National Consultation, were the following:

- The Kabila government must take the first step in reconciliation with the Congolese people;
- The political opposition must redefine its role and conduct itself with more openness and respect;
- The troops from Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda must withdraw and leave the Congolese to exercise self-determination;
- The governments of Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda must apologise to the Congolese for the bloodshed and violence caused by their military involvement in the DRC; and
- The world's great powers must stop financing wars in the third world. (Kambale 2000:2).

Any intention by President Kabila to control the National Consultation back-fired when some civil society groups heavily criticised the new government. They complained that Kabila was no different to his predecessor, Mobutu Sese Seko. The success of this forum arose therefore, from its ability to openly criticise the Kabila government and also to bring civil society groups from the occupied territories in the east to the forum in Kinshasa.

Other examples that reflected similar activities of track two diplomacy, were: a two day conference entitled *Crisis in the Great Lakes: Peace Prospects and Regional Dimensions*, hosted by the Johannesburg-based Centre for Policy Studies, and a two-day conference entitled *Whither Regional Peace and Security? The DRC after the War*, organised by the Africa Institute of South Africa, from 24-25 February 2000, in Pretoria. The discussions that emanated from these conferences provided greater insight into the conflict and contributed to the production of information on the subject.

Track two diplomatic efforts in the DRC conflict created an awareness of the complexity of the problem and crisis while at the same time it also provided practitioners in the field of unofficial diplomacy with lessons for future attempts. The main lesson to be learnt from all the track two efforts is that adequate preparation must be done before attempting to bring the warring factions face to face. This preparatory stage must entail the gathering of more information about the dynamics of the conflict and the people involved in it. In addition, more one-to-one meetings must be undertaken to

determine the likelihood of a group meeting with its opponents without any confrontation. At the same time, one-to-one meetings must be used to influence extremist groups on the need to engage in dialogue with their adversaries. In other words, track two efforts could play a more meaningful role by conducting one-to-one meetings to pursue, individually, each warring party's commitment to enter into talks with their opponents. However, such efforts must be linked to the official track one initiatives to provide the necessary preparation of the warring sides, more detailed background information, and dialogue needed for a better equipped track one mission.

Conclusion

Track one diplomatic efforts in the DRC conflict were embarked upon with the central aim of resolving the military dimension of the conflict and achieving a speedy cessation of hostilities. These diplomatic initiatives focused exclusively on the warring governments, the RCD and MLC rebels. The absence of rebels from neighbouring states and of the Congolese Mai-Mai fighters in the official peace process meant a continuation of conflict, since official peace agreements lacked their commitment to cease fighting. While "the long-term stability of the Great Lakes region cannot be sustained without a stable and effective government in the DRC", the internal disputes of neighbouring Angola, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda need to be resolved to put an end to the war in the DRC (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1998:17). Official track one diplomatic efforts served only to provide a respite to the conflict. Deep-rooted causes such as that of inter-ethnic rivalry based on the access to Congolese land and resources, especially in the Kivu province, were discussed during track two efforts. Moreover, track two efforts provided the unarmed actors with the opportunity to present their position in the conflict which led to a proliferation of information on the subject.

Endnote

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