DR Congo: Ending the Cycle of Violence in Ituri

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Table of Contents

Principal Findings

What's new? Since late 2017, armed groups, predominantly from the Lendu ethnic farming community, have committed deadly attacks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Ituri province. Initial targets were members of the neighbouring Hema community, who are mostly herders, and the Congolese armed forces. But attacks are now increasingly indiscriminate.

Why does it matter? The escalating violence has revived historical rivalries between the Hema and Lendu, who fought each other during the 1999-2003 war. The involvement of actors from the adjacent province of North Kivu, and even from neighbouring countries, could exacerbate the challenges faced by President Félix Tshisekedi.

What should be done? Kinshasa should aim to negotiate the surrender of Lendu militias as part of a broader dialogue between the Hema, Lendu and other communities. The Quadripartite Summit that brings together the DRC and its neighbours – Angola, Rwanda and Uganda – could help address the conflict's regional dimensions.

Executive Summary

Since December 2017, violence in the province of Ituri, in the north east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has left nearly 1,000 people dead and half a million displaced. Breaking out in the territory of Djugu, small-scale attacks first pitted the two main communities in Ituri, the Hema and Lendu, against each other. Subsequently, Lendu militias targeted the Hema, and then the national army, before attacking nearby territories. External actors, including from North Kivu province and bordering countries, are also involved. To stem a dangerous escalation, the Congolese government should focus on a strategy aimed at negotiating the demobilisation of Lendu militias while supporting a broader dialogue between the Hema, Lendu and other communities in Ituri. Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi should simultaneously work with neighbouring countries to halt support from actors in the region for the attackers.

The current crisis differs from the 1999-2003 conflict in Ituri, during which Hema and Lendu communities participated in massacres undertaken by associated militias. Today, most assailants are recruited from within the Lendu community and brought together in an association of militias, the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo. In contrast to the previous conflict, Lendu leaders have distanced themselves from these militias. Still, given the limits of the government's military response, the possibility of escalating ethnic violence cannot be dismissed. Lendu militias continue to expand. Thus far, the Hema have not mounted systematic reprisals, but they do not rule out mobilising their youth if attacks continue. Young Hema have organised into self-defence groups and erected roadblocks in Ituri, which should be seen as forewarning of the risk of ethnic confrontation.

The clashes in Ituri could have multiple ramifications. With its growing violence, the province has already attracted fighters from neighbouring North Kivu, the epicentre of insecurity in the eastern DRC. Members of former rebel movements, including some cohorts of the M23 group largely based in Uganda, have also sought to profit from ethnic tensions in Ituri and North Kivu and interfere in the conflict. Furthermore, the violence is exacerbating tensions between Rwanda and Uganda, each of which played an important role in the Ituri war of 1999-2003. The two countries now accuse each other of supporting armed groups in the eastern DRC. A COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020 in Irumu, a territory bordering North Kivu, risks spreading, which could further weaken authorities faced with a double threat of disease and unrest.

A number of steps could help to break the cycle of violence in Ituri and prevent outside interference:

❑ The government should resume dialogue with those militias in Ituri that have already expressed willingness to surrender under the right conditions. It should also pursue a dialogue with other militias involved in the Ituri violence to pursue their demobilisation. In order to reach a broad consensus on disarmament methods (including on the issue of amnesty), the government should support the mediation efforts of Ituri deputies' caucus in the National Assembly.

❑ Kinshasa should prioritise the reintegration of militiamen into civilian life, in particular by setting up a framework for support and training to provide them with alternative livelihoods.

❑ Provincial and national authorities should foster talks between the Hema and Lendu communities by inviting traditional chieftains and other eminent figures to discuss local issues – such as land disputes – that generate violence and identify measures to better manage security on the ground. Subsequently, Kinshasa should organise a broad dialogue in Ituri, including communities not directly involved in the crisis, to ensure that these measures meet the population's general expectations.

❑ In order to advance Ituri's development and security, Kinshasa should set up a special fund for the region, and, as far as possible, mobilise bilateral partners and the World Bank to contribute.

❑ Congolese President Tshisekedi should put the Ituri conflict on the agenda for the next Quadripartite Summit, which will bring together Angola, the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda. He and his Angolan counterpart, João Lourenço, should press Rwanda and Uganda to use this forum to discuss reciprocal accusations of aid to armed groups in the eastern DRC, including in Ituri, and commit to ending this support.

Until these steps are taken, the conflict risks escalating in the years to come. A long-term solution to the Ituri crisis would help break the cycle of violence in the eastern DRC and ease tensions in the Great Lakes region.

Nairobi/Bunia/Kinshasa/Kampala/Brussels, 15 July 2020

DR Congo: Ending the Cycle of Violence in Ituri

I.   **Introduction**

Almost eighteen months after President Félix Tshisekedi's election in December 2018, several provinces in the DRC are experiencing a high degree of insecurity. Violence perpetrated by armed militias – the remnants or consequences of successive conflicts since the 1990s – persists in certain areas in the east. In the far north-eastern province of Ituri, violence has resurfaced fourteen years after an inter-ethnic war that claimed thousands of victims between 1999 and 2003. The clashes were first limited to Djugu territory, with small-scale attacks between the Hema and Lendu, the province's two major ethnic communities. But Tshisekedi's arrival in office coincided with the intensification of attacks by militiamen, largely Lendu, against members of other communities and the national army.

The new conflict in Ituri has become a national issue for the president. On 30 June 2019, the country's Independence Day, he travelled to Ituri to demonstrate his willingness to put an end to a conflict which he described as a "genocide" and an attempt to unsettle his hold on power.[1] Since then, Kinshasa has led military operations aimed at neutralising the militiamen, while provincial authorities have sought to initiate a dialogue with them through Lendu intermediaries of high standing. In the meantime, fighting in Ituri has raged on, displaying increasingly close links with conflicts in the nearby North Kivu province, itself marked by numerous past wars in which neighbouring countries were involved. During the Second Congo War of 1998-2002, the conflict in Ituri contributed to the worsening of relations between Rwanda and Uganda, countries which intervened militarily and supported armed factions in the DRC, including in Ituri, and which today accuse each other of destabilising eastern Congo along with the whole region.[2]

This report presents a chronology of the events that led to this upsurge in fighting, analyses the conflict's cyclical nature and its underlying causes, and identifies its main actors in order to understand why it persists. Finally, it puts forward recommendations for breaking the cycle of violence. It is based on dozens of interviews conducted

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[1] "RDC : en Ituri, Félix Tshisekedi dénonce 'une tentative de génocide'", *Jeune Afrique*, 3 July 2019; "DR Congo president calls Ituri violence 'attempted genocide'", Al Jazeera, 3 July 2019.

[2] Crisis Group Africa Report N°64, *Congo Crisis: Military Intervention in Ituri,* 13 June 2003. See "Rapport public sur les conflits en territoire de Djugu, province de l'Ituri, décembre 2017 à septembre 2019", UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO)/MONUSCO, January 2020. In December 2019, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that 360,000 individuals had been displaced due to the latest crisis in Ituri. It acknowledged that the movement of displaced persons was continuing, and that only a portion of them (227,000) were housed in the 72 sites maintained by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). See "Weekly Emergency Update, Ituri and North Kivu Provinces, Democratic Republic of the Congo (2-8 December 2019)", UNHCR. See also Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°150, *Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes*, 23 January 2020.

in Bunia and Kinshasa, in the DRC, as well as in Kampala, Uganda, from July 2019 to May 2020. These interviews involved political leaders, including Hema and Lendu public figures, diplomats, former members of armed groups, security and natural resources experts, civil society actors, non-governmental organisation staffers, representatives of the UN Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and aid workers.

II.   **Ituri: The Politics of a Tormented Province**

For several centuries, the Hema and the Lendu, Ituri's two main ethnic communities, have been fighting for access to land and local power. In this rural province, land is an essential resource. The Lendu are largely farmers, while the Hema are herders. During the era of Belgian colonisation, authorities helped place the Hema higher up the local hierarchy; their chief had significant powers, allowing them to establish dominance over the Lendu. The colonists also pursued a discriminatory education policy in favour of the Hema, who acquired more and more advantages, notably access to positions in the administration, the Catholic Church and businesses.[3] After independence, Hema elites continued to benefit from the policy of "Zairianisation" (nationalisation of the means of production held by foreigners from 1973) under former President Joseph-Désiré Mobutu (1965-1997), and were able to take over a great deal of land.[4]

The authorities in Kinshasa, the political and military elites of other Congolese provinces, and the DRC's neighbours have also taken part, to varying degrees, in the conflicts that have struck Ituri. The regimes of Laurent Kabila (1997-2001) and his son Joseph (2001-2019) attempted to bring this strategic region, rich in minerals, into the fold of the Republic, sometimes by exploiting local inter-ethnic antagonisms.[5] At the beginning of the 2000s, for instance, Congolese elites harnessed the tensions between the Hema and Lendu by mobilising populations and militias to promote their own political and economic interests. The involvement of neighbouring states further aggravated the conflict, which became the Second Congo War, a proxy war between the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda.[6]

Between 1999 and 2003, deadly clashes took place between the two communities in Ituri province. Tensions focused on access to land, natural resources and local political power. The involvement of outside actors, from Kinshasa or neighbouring countries such as Rwanda and Uganda, who supported opposing militias, exacerbated the hostilities. In May 2003, as a transitional government took office in the DRC, the UN Security Council authorised the European Union to carry out the Artemis military operation in Ituri, which put an end to the fighting and managed to take the provincial capital, Bunia, from the control of militias who had divided the city's main districts among themselves.[7]

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[3] Thierry Vircoulon, "L'Ituri ou la guerre au pluriel", *Afrique Contemporaine*, vol. 3 (2005), pp. 129-146.

[4] By 1974, 1,920 plantations and 120 Belgian companies were Zairianised. See "L'expérience zaïroise: la zaïrianisation", Charles Kabuya's Blog, 4 May 2013.

[5] "Ituri Becomes Congo's Latest Flashpoint", Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 24 August 2018.

[6] Between 1998 and 2002, the DRC was the scene of an armed conflict involving nine African countries. The Rwandan and Ugandan armies notably fought the Congolese army and its allies. See "Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of DR Congo", UN Security Council, 12 April 2001; "Case Concerning Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda)", International Court of Justice, 19 December 2005. See Crisis Group Africa Reports N°7, *Congo at War*, 17 November 1998; and N°44, *Storm Clouds over Sun City: The Urgent Need to Recast the Congolese Peace Process*, 14 May 2002.

[7] See Crisis Group Africa Report N°140, *Congo: Four Priorities for Sustainable Peace in Ituri*, 13 May 2008, as well as Crisis Group Report, *Congo Crisis: Military Intervention in Ituri*, op. cit. See also

After the war, Kinshasa's government succeeded in establishing a fragile peace. Hostilities ceased, and national authorities instituted a power-sharing system aimed at ensuring intercommunal cohesion. They appointed members of different ethnic communities to positions in Ituri's interim administration – a system which remained in place even after the 2006 elections.[8] Between 2003 and 2006, a special administration regime was established in Ituri. The militias were never dismantled, however, and some held on to their weapons. And, though Kinshasa extended its authority over Ituri, the problems that led to the war – land disputes and rivalries over the control of natural resources – were not durably resolved.

After Ituri acquired the status of province in 2015, Kinshasa appointed Jefferson Abdallah Pene Mbaka, a Lendu, as special commissioner with the powers of a provincial governor. Two deputies and other administration officials assisted him, following the same logic of power sharing. In the gubernatorial election of March 2016, Pene Mbaka was confirmed as governor of Ituri, along with the vice governor Pacifique Keta Upar, a member of the Alur community, which is the largest in Mahagi territory, and with Hema individuals heading several important provincial ministries.

The sudden outbreak of violence, starting in December 2017 and mostly led by Lendu militias against the Hema, marks a new period of high political instability in the province. Under pressure from civil society actors, who denounced the governor's mismanagement of the security situation, the authorities in Kinshasa dismissed Pene Mbaka in December 2018; meanwhile, several hundred people had already lost their lives. Vice Governor Keta Upar acted as interim governor until the April 2019 election, when Jean Bamanisa, a Hema and independent candidate, was chosen as governor, and Chalo Dudu, a Lendu, as vice governor.[9]

The change in the province's leadership did not end the violence. Accused of mismanagement, Jean Bamanisa was removed from office in November 2019 following a vote by provincial deputies. But the Hema community condemned the motion of no confidence.[10] A serious political crisis resulted, pitting the provincial assembly against the government, and paralysing the dialogue initiated by Bamanisa with militiamen and between ethnic communities. The justice system rehabilitated Bamanisa, and he returned to Ituri on 28 February 2020. His three-month absence was marked by a rise in violent incidents.

Onesphore Sematumba, "Ituri : la guerre dans la guerre", *Regards Croisés,* no. 8 (2003), pp. 20-26; "DRC on the Precipice: The Deepening Human Rights and Humanitarian Crisis in Ituri", Amnesty International, 20 March 2003; and "Special Report on Events in Ituri, January 2002-December 2003", UN Security Council S/2004/573, 16 July 2004.

[8] In 2006, the new Congolese constitution established a highly decentralised state. The number of provinces rose from eleven to 26, corresponding to the former districts, including that of Ituri. This breakdown has been in effect since 2015.

[9] "Ituri : c'est confirmé, Abdallah Pene Mbaka n'est plus Gouverneur de province", Bunia Actualité, 26 December 2018.

[10] The motion of no confidence against Bamanisa was voted on 20 November by 27 of the 42 deputies. See "Ituri : motion de défiance contre le gouverneur Bamanisa, qui sont les députés signataires ?", Bunia Actualité, 19 November 2019; "Ituri : crise institutionnelle, la communauté Hema dénonce un plan de déstabilisation de la province", Bunia Actualité, 31 December 2019.

III. **Increasingly Ambitious Attacks**

After fourteen years of relative peace in Ituri, highly violent clashes broke out in December 2017 in Djugu territory, before spreading elsewhere in the province. Unlike the 1999-2003 war, which saw generalised fighting between militias associated with the Hema and Lendu, the current violence largely involves specific militias composed of Lendu youths but not necessarily supported by the majority of the community. At the start of this new wave of violence, Lendu assailants targeted members of the Hema community in Djugu territory. The attacks have now multiplied, targeting the military and other communities, including the Alur in Mahagi territory, north of Djugu. Some Hema youths have been involved in small-scale attacks or reprisals, but the Hema have not yet mobilised militias as in the clashes between 1999 and 2003.

A. *Ethnic Tensions and Apparent Lendu Mobilisation*

In Ituri province, occasional local clashes between the Hema and Lendu have morphed into systematic attacks by Lendu militiamen against the Hema, mainly in Djugu territory and in the north of the province.

The death of Father Florent Dhunji, a Lendu priest, during a stay at the presbytery of the Bahema abbots at Drodro on 5 June 2017, was the spark that ignited the gunpowder.[11] The Catholic Church remains vague as to the circumstances of his death, allowing rumours to proliferate. Later, certain Lendu accused the Hema of planning to exterminate their leaders, with the priest representing the first victim.[12] This allegation led to a resurgence of hate speech, with memories of the 1999-2003 conflict still fresh in both communities' minds. After several months marked by low levels of violence, tensions were rekindled by an altercation on 17 December 2017 between a soldier and a Lendu youth at the military post of Uzi, in Djugu territory, near Ladedjo.[13] Hema youths pursued and beat up the young man. The next day, Lendu youths retaliated by injuring three Hema women with a machete in a field in Ladedjo, on Lendu territory. In retribution, Hema youths attacked the village of Tete, setting fire to several dozen houses.[14]

A local initiative then led to a lull in the violence. On 22 December 2017, in a tense climate, Governor Pene Mbaka took a peace delegation to Blukwa-Mbi (a Lendu locality of the Ladedjo groupment, chiefdom of Walendu-Pitsi) and then to Blukwa-Etat (a Hema locality of the Buku groupment, chiefdom of Bahema-Nord).[15] During public meetings, he called on the two traditional chiefs, Logbe (a Lendu) from Wa-

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[11] Crisis Group interviews, civil society figures, politicians and independent researcher, Goma and Bunia, July 2019.

[12] "Congo-Kinshasa : la communauté Lendu de Kinshasa adresse un message de paix aux communautés d'Ituri", All Africa, 21 June 2019.

[13] "Rapport public sur les conflits en territoire de Djugu, province de l'Ituri, décembre 2017 à septembre 2019", UNJHRO/MONUSCO, January 2020.

[14] "Reigniting Ituri? Towards a Reading of the 2018 Djugu Violence", PAX, February 2019, p. 15.

[15] A "groupement" (or groupment in English) is the smallest administrative entity in the DRC. The country is divided into 26 provinces, which are composed of cities and territories. The territories are subdivided into rural communes, sectors and chiefdoms, with these sectors and chiefdoms in turn made up of groupments.

Iendu-Pitsi and Pilo (a Hema) from Bahema-Nord, to exchange messages of peace and forgiveness. "The chief of Bahema-Nord and his counterpart from Walendu-Pitsi must help us find the instigators of the crisis. They know them, and I have come with civilian and military judicial authorities to seize these individuals", he insisted.[16] Following this firm speech, no major incident was reported for more than a month.

A fresh series of attacks occurred on Djugu territory in February 2018, with the principal target being the largely Hema chiefdom of Bahema-Nord. On 10 February 2018, assailants killed at least nineteen people from Hema villages in Bahema-Nord.[17] That same day, armed individuals also killed five Hema and set fire to houses in Bahema-Bajer.[18] The violence reached its climax in mid-February, when 60 members of the Hema community lost their lives as their village, Rule, burned. The assailants' identity was not confirmed, but several testimonies converge on a militia that was reportedly formed in two principally Lendu chiefdoms, Walendu-Pitsi and Walendu-Djatsi, in Djugu territory.[19]

B.   *Lendu Militias Target the Army*

From February 2018, Lendu militias began targeting army positions. For the militiamen, these attacks served a dual purpose. They aimed, on one hand, to push the army out of its positions and, on the other, to obtain weapons and ammunition. A Lendu political leader and Congolese army officers describe the modern equipment and heavy weaponry carried away by the militiamen as spoils of war.[20] On 20 February 2018, assailants identified by both civil and military authorities as Lendu killed two soldiers in Tche (Bahema-Nord) and Bakome (Walendu-Djatsi).[21] As of then, attackers continued to set their sights on army and police positions. On 16 September, militiamen killed nine members of the armed forces in Muvaramu, Songamoya and Tara.[22]

While between September 2018 and April 2019 the violence was steady but not intensive, from May to June 2019 Lendu militiamen started carrying out more large-scale attacks. On 10 June 2019, suspected Hema actors killed four Lendu traders on the road to the village of Bembu-Nizi, a predominantly Hema area. The Lendu immediately launched reprisals against nearby Hema villages, which they systematically burned down, killing the inhabitants. At the end of June, several sources reported 160 dead.[23] The survivors fled. Since then, the conflict has been marked by a grave humanitarian crisis.[24] At least 360,000 people have sought refuge in secure neigh-

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[16] "Il n'y a pas de conflit entre Hema et Lendu à Djugu, juste une tension : constat du Gouverneur Abdallah après sa visite dans la région", Bunia Actualité, 23 December 2017.
[17] "Reigniting Ituri? Towards a Reading of the 2018 Djugu Violence", op. cit.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Crisis Group interviews, civil society figures, Bunia, September 2019.
[20] Crisis Group interviews, Lendu politician, Congolese army officers, Bunia, January 2019.
[21] "Reigniting Ituri? Towards a Reading of the 2018 Djugu Violence", op. cit., p. 11.
[22] Ibid., p. 26.
[23] "WFP scales up assistance in Eastern DRC as conflict flares", press release, World Food Program, 2 July 2019.
[24] In June, OCHA estimated that 360,000 people had been displaced, the vast majority of whom (215,000) were staying with host families. "Weekly Emergency Update: Ituri and North Kivu Provinces, Democratic Republic of the Congo (14-22 September 2019)", UNHCR.

bouring areas of Djugu, in the nearby territories of Mahagi, Aru and Irumu, and in the provincial capital, Bunia. According to the witness testimony of several survivors, the attacks on Hema villages at the start of the crisis were carried out by young people who spoke Kilendu, the Lendu language, and most of them came from Lendu villages.[25]

In response to these attacks, the army launched Operation Zaruba ya Ituri ("Ituri Storm" in Swahili) in June 2019, aimed at getting militias "out of the way", but it faced several challenges.[26] The army liberated several areas, including Wago forest, the presumed sanctuary of Lendu militiamen, which it regained on 26 June 2019. While doing so, it dispersed the militiamen in an area under their control, where they benefit from the protection of certain members of their Lendu community. Subsequently, the militiamen were able to spread terror among civilian populations, including in internally displaced person (IDP) camps, and reoccupy localities from which they had been expelled.[27] These military operations also rekindled tensions between the Hema and Lendu; the latter have a negative view of the military, which they consider to be the Hema's natural ally.[28] Finally, army officers publicly accused the Lendu of colluding with local and foreign armed groups, further souring intercommunal relations.[29]

During this same period, attacks spread beyond Djugu territory, affecting a vast geographical area that notably includes the neighbouring territories of Mahagi and Irumu, and also targeting the Alur community. On 16 July, suspected Lendu militiamen killed eight Alur in the Babulaba groupment in Irumu territory (south of Djugu), about 15km north of Bunia. They went on to kill two other members of this community on 17 July in the same region.[30] On the same day, they also killed five people in the village of Soloya, in the same groupment. In the space of two weeks in September 2019, militiamen shot or decapitated dozens of victims in the territories of Djugu and Mahagi (north of Djugu) during six different attacks.[31] On 18 September, an attack targeted an IDP camp near the temporary MONUSCO base in Roe.[32] By the end of December 2019, at least 700 people had been killed and thousands of houses burned down.[33]

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[25] "Reigniting Ituri? Towards a Reading of the 2018 Djugu Violence", op. cit.; and Crisis Group interviews, civil society figures, Bunia, July 2019.

[26] "Les Fardc lancent l'opération 'Zaruba ya Ituri' pour mettre fin à la violence et l'insécurité", Politico, 27 June 2019.

[27] "RDC : les déplacés des camps de l'Ituri visés par des attaques communautaires", RFI, 22 September 2019.

[28] Crisis Group analyst's interview in a previous capacity, Congolese army intelligence officer, May 2018.

[29] "Ituri : les Fardc et la communauté Lendu font la paix des braves", Adiac, 8 October 2019.

[30] "Ituri : La communauté Alur décrète 3 jours de deuil en mémoire de ses 10 membres tués dans la périphérie de Bunia", 7sur7, 19 July 2019.

[31] "Irumu : cinq personnes tuées par des inconnus dans le village de Soloya 2", Bunia Actualité, 17 July 2019.

[32] "La Monusco condamne une série d'attaques ciblées contre des déplacés en Ituri", press release, MONUSCO, 19 September 2019.

[33] UNJHRO, op. cit.

In January 2020, after violence escalated in the neighbouring province of North Kivu, the army withdrew from its positions in Ituri, leaving the way open for Lendu militiamen to regain control of 22 villages in the chiefdoms of Bahema-Bajere and Bahema-Nord, in Djugu territory.[34] They also took back two Mokambo chiefdom groupments in Mahagi territory and all of Walendu-Pitsi in Djugu.[35]

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[34] "Ituri : plus de 22 villages sous contrôle des miliciens de la Codeco récupérés par l'armée à Djugu", Media Congo, 23 January 2020.
[35] "Ituri : deux groupements de Mahagi sous contrôle des miliciens de Codeco", Radio Okapi, 24 January 2020.

IV. **The Actors: Between Local Antagonisms and External Interference**

For the most part, the violence spreading from Djugu territory is attributable to Lendu militiamen, some of whom came of age as part of the Nationalist and Integrationist Front (Front des Nationalistes Intégrationnistes, or FNI). The FNI is itself a former Lendu armed group based in the same territory, allied with the Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri (Force de Résistance Patriotique d'Ituri, or FRPI), a Lendu armed group based in Irumu, which took part in the Ituri war of 1999-2003.

At first, no one claimed responsibility for the attacks, but later, an association of militias called the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CODECO) came forward. It then appeared that several small groups of assailants were in fact working independently, with no overarching command structure. Some of these different militias scattered across Ituri claim to be part of a different group, the Union of Revolutionaries for the Defence of the Congolese People (Union des Révolutionnaires pour la Défense du Peuple Congolais, or URPDC), and ask to be referred to by this name. But civil and military authorities as well as public opinion recognise no fundamental difference between CODECO and URPDC, considering the latter to be an extension of the former.[36]

A.   *CODECO*

At the start of the latest conflict in Ituri, the identity of the attackers was difficult to confirm, even if everything pointed to a group of mostly Lendu youths, based in the Walendu-Pitsi sector. Authorities later named them as being part of CODECO, an association of militias. On 12 June 2019, eighteen months after the violence started, Congolese armed forces announced that they had identified the leader of this association, a certain "Ngudjolo".[37] Several witnesses claim that CODECO helped mobilise Lendu youth with anti-Hema hate rhetoric.[38] Similarly, its sanctuary in Wago forest reportedly served as a training base for the youths involved in the attacks.[39] Governor Bamanisa himself designated the militias as Lendu: "At this stage, the perpetrators of this violence have been identified. They are Lendu militias based in Wago forest and led by a certain Justin Ngudjolo".[40] In June 2019 on local radio, Ngudjolo declared himself leader of the "armed group of Wago forest", heading a force of 2,350, armed and trained to defend the Lendu population against the Hema.[41]

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[36] "Ituri : les miliciens de Codeco se dissent 'prêts' à saisir la main tendue du Président Tshisekedi", Bunia Actualité, 17 May 2020; Crisis Group telephone interviews, civil society actor and political analyst, Bunia, May 2020; Crisis Group correspondence, NGO worker based in Bunia, June 2020.
[37] "Ituri : c'est un groupe armé dirigé par un certain Ngudjolo qui tue à Bunia", Media Congo, 13 June 2019.
[38] Crisis Group interviews, civil society actor, Bunia, July 2019; MONUSCO official who spent time in Djugu at the height of the violence in 2018, May 2020.
[39] Crisis Group interviews, women's NGO leader, Bunia, July 2019. Crisis Group analyst's interviews in a previous capacity, Congolese intelligence sources, Bunia, November 2018.
[40] "RDC : en Ituri, nous n'avons pas réussi à asseoir l'autorité de l'Etat", *Jeune Afrique*, 18 June 2019.
[41] "Rapport public sur les conflits en territoire de Djugu, province de l'Ituri, décembre 2017 à septembre 2019", UNJHRO/MONUSCO, January 2020.

Indeed, the links between CODECO and the militias responsible for the violence perpetrated during the Ituri war of 1999-2003 are now more evident. CODECO was founded in the 1970s by the late Bernard Kakado, with the aim of promoting agriculture in the chiefdom of Walendu-Bindi in Irumu territory.[42] During the 1999-2003 war, Kakado organised a Lendu self-defence operation before joining the FRPI, while CODECO – as an agricultural cooperative – ceased to exist.[43] At the war's end, the various ethnic militias did not completely dissolve; some, like the FNI and the FRPI, continued their activities and hid their weapons in the different communities.[44] When militia attacks began in 2017, Lendu civilians in Djugu attributed the violence to "CODECO", suggesting a link to Kakado and the FRPI. But according to security forces, some of the Lendu attackers who fall under the authority of Ngudjolo and use the CODECO brand name have stronger ties to the FNI.[45]

Although the militiamen have specific demands that have mobilised the Lendu for decades, it remains difficult to determine to what degree this community supports them. Their demands revolve around two major issues: the reclaiming of land allegedly taken by the Hema, and a refusal to accept foreign exploitation of local resources.[46] That said, prominent Lendu figures denounce the violence. They claim that, far from being a local movement, the militias are the product of outside manipulation, in particular by Congolese politicians living in Kinshasa and Uganda.[47] Finally, they point out that they never met with the aim of creating a militia, but rather to weaken CODECO, notably by dissuading young people from joining the movement and by advocating for dialogue as a means of ending the crisis.[48] Thus, in a declaration signed on 18 October 2019 in Réthy, the members of the Lendu community encourage all Lendu to work toward peace.[49]

From March 2020, Lendu militias suffered a series of setbacks on the ground but continued to put pressure on civilians. The army arrested several militiamen and others were killed, including Justin Ngudjolo himself on 27 March at Mokpa, in the Buba groupment in Djugu territory.[50] As retaliation for Ngudjolo's murder by the

[42] Elisabeth Clavere, "Vivre dans le 'combattantisme', parcours d'un chef de milice en Ituri (République démocratique du Congo)", *Terrain – Anthropologie & sciences humaines*, no. 65 (September 2015), pp. 159-181.

[43] "Bunia : Kakado, le chef de la milice FRPI, condamné à perpétuité pour crimes de guerre", Radio Okapi, 10 August 2010.

[44] "FNI and FRPI: Local Resistance and Regional Alliances in North-eastern Congo", Rift Valley Institute – Usalama Project, 30 July 2013.

[45] Crisis Group interview, Bunia, July 2019. Crisis Group interview, Congolese military source, September 2019.

[46] Crisis Group interviews, civil society actors, Bunia, July 2019.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Crisis Group interview, prominent Lendu figure, Kinshasa, October 2019.

[49] "La communauté lendu s'engage à œuvrer pour la paix dans le territoire de Djugu en Ituri", press release, MONUSCO, 19 October 2019.

[50] "Djugu : la société civile confirme la mort du chef rebelle Ngudjolo de la milice Codeco", Bunia Acutalité, 27 March 2020; Crisis Group telephone interviews, civil society actors in Bunia, March 2020. On 13 March, Mr Ndalo, in charge of supplies, was shot dead by the army in Tshele, in the Walendu-Djatsi sector. On 17 March, in Alha in the Walendu-Pitsi sector, security services arrested Raymond Tseni, in charge of relations with armed groups in Ituri and the neighbouring provinces, and Joseph Amula (aka Kesta), an adviser to Justin Ngudjolo. Intelligence services later transferred

army, however, in April Lendu militias intensified their attacks and regained control of several localities in the Djugu, Mahagi and Irumu territories. On 10 April, militiamen killed seventeen people in the village of Dhalla; on 13 April, they killed 28 people in two separate attacks on Ndoki-Koli and Dzathi, in the chiefdom of Bahema-Nord.[51] On the same day, they attacked army and police positions in the locality of Mwanga, 10km from Bunia, killing at least five people, including three government soldiers and two police officers.[52]

Following Ngudjolo's death, CODECO's organisational structure became opaque, and the group's degree of influence and control over other Lendu militias remains uncertain.[53] Several factions are vying for CODECO leadership, including the URPDC, which has positioned itself as the prime candidate. This political and military movement, which was created on 19 September 2018 and spoke out on 28 January 2020 to claim responsibility for "guerrilla" actions in Djugu territory, rejects the names "CODECO" and "Ngudjolo armed group" as imposed by "third parties".[54] Its objective is to unite all the ethnic militias active in the province, not only the Lendu.[55]

B.   *Prominent Hema Figures*

Faced with increasingly regular attacks from Lendu assailants, prominent Hema figures have chosen restraint. They try to dissuade young people from organising themselves into militias and counter-attacking, but they are not always able to avoid minor incidents such as the erection of barriers by Hema youth on Ituri roads, used to screen Lendu movements.[56]

The return of Yves Mandro Kahwa Panga (known as "Chief Kahwa") to the DRC on 20 June 2019, after years of exile in Uganda, could presage a more serious threat.[57] Former leader of the Hema militia Party for Unity and Safeguarding of the Integrity of Congo (Parti pour l'Unité et la Sauvegarde de l'Intégrité du Congo, or PUSIC), Kahwa is one of the deadliest warlords of the Ituri war. The government appears keen to involve him in the dialogue, given his ability to mobilise the Hema.[58] Kahwa,

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them to Kinshasa. See "Ituri : le chargé des opérations et ravitaillement de la Codeco neutralisé par les FARDC", L'avant-Garde, 16 March 2020; and "Djugu : deux grands leaders de la milice Codeco capturés par les services de sécurité", Bunia Actualité, 17 March 2020.

[51] "RDC-Ituri : 17 morts dans une attaque à Djugu ce vendredi matin", Actualité.cd, 10 April 2020. "RDC : 23 civils tués dans l'attaque de deux villages dans l'Ituri", La Libre Afrique, 15 April 2020.

[52] "RDC : trois soldats et deux policiers tués dans une attaque de la milice Codeco à Irumu", Actualité.cd, 13 April 2020.

[53] "Mise à jour sur la situation dans les territoires de Djugu et Mahagi, province de l'Ituri, du 1er octobre 2019 au 30 avril 2020", UNJHRO/MONUSCO, May 2020, p. 5.

[54] "Déclaration de l'URPDC face aux différentes incriminations imputées à sa charge", 28 January 2020.

[55] Crisis Group telephone interview, civil society actor, Bunia, May 2020.

[56] On 13 July 2019, as Vice Governor Shalo Dudu Martin was on his way to Kpandroma to launch a peace conference organised by his Lendu community, his convoy was targeted by Hema youths, who threw objects at the Lopa barrier. See "Djugu : le cortège du vice-gouverneur de province a essuyé des projectiles jetés par des jeunes à Lopa", Bunia Actualité, 13 July 2019.

[57] "Yves Kahwa Panga Mandro prêche la paix en Ituri", La voix de l'Ituri, 20 June 2019. See the Trial International fact sheet on Yves Mandro Kahwa Panga.

[58] Crisis Group interview, MONUSCO representative, Kinshasa, October 2019.

one of former President Joseph Kabila's most virulent critics before the December 2018 election, does indeed have strong support from part of the community. He claims to have returned to support Tshisekedi in bringing peace to Ituri. For the time being, he has resumed his position as traditional chief and has engaged in a dialogue with a few Lendu leaders. But if the clashes continue, civil society figures in Bunia and MONUSCO representatives fear that he could reactivate his local network of warlords and fuel the conflict.[59]

C.   *Close Ties with North Kivu*

During the Second Congo War of 1998-2002, political and military movements from North Kivu established links with local militias in Ituri. These relations persisted after the war and continue to this day. The escalating violence in Ituri could once again attract violent actors from North Kivu, the epicentre of insecurity in the sub-region, to the detriment of security in the DRC. Some members of the Allied Democratic Forces, a Ugandan rebel group based in North Kivu, have already crossed into Ituri during the present tensions.[60] If this trend continues, frictions between Uganda and Rwanda, which have historically supported different armed groups in the two provinces, are likely to grow. The two countries have recently accused each other of contributing to insecurity in North Kivu, and Rwandan officials denounce Uganda's involvement in the violence in Ituri, an allegation denied by Kampala.[61]

In recent years, armed groups have moved between North Kivu and Ituri, heightening the concerns of provincial and national Congolese officials about the interactions between conflicts in the two provinces. These movements continue to this day, for example with the arrival of members of the Allied Democratic Forces in Mambasa territory, in Ituri.[62] Even if Mambasa is not directly linked to the conflicts between the Hema and Lendu in Djugu, Congolese officials fear that these movements of armed groups herald the start of more widespread hostilities encompassing North Kivu and Ituri.[63]

The movements of armed groups are accompanied by massive displacements of populations from North Kivu to Ituri, in particular a significant exodus of Hutu migrants (locally called Banyabwisha) after 2015. The Hutus' presence fuels tensions between the Hema and Lendu, who accuse each other of collaborating with them.[64] A senior Congolese government official claims that the Banyabwisha are implicated both as military trainers of Lendu militiamen, and alongside the Hema, whom they

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[59] "Djugu : campagne de sensibilisation sur la paix, le chef Yves Kahwa Panga Mandro déplore l'insuffisance des moyens", La voix de l'Ituri, 18 September 2019. Crisis Group interviews, civil society figures, Bunia, July 2019; MONUSCO representative, Kinshasa, October 2019.
[60] Crisis Group interviews, senior MONUSCO official and MONUSCO human rights expert, Kinshasa, February 2020.
[61] Crisis Group interviews, Ugandan senior officials, October and December 2019. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes*, op. cit.
[62] Crisis Group interview, MONUSCO senior official, Kinshasa, February 2020.
[63] "RDC : les ADF s'étendent en Ituri et causent 34 morts en deux jours", Radio Okapi, 5 February 2020. Crisis Group analyst's interviews in a previous capacity, Congolese intelligence sources, Bunia and Mambasa, November 2018.
[64] Crisis Group analyst's interviews in a previous capacity, Lendu and Hema civil society actors, Bunia, November 2018.

help protect their herds from militiamen.[65] In February 2018, a few Hutu were reportedly arrested alongside Lendu attackers by Congolese authorities, and another was lynched in Djugu by the population, who believed he was an assailant.[66] On 22 June 2019, the Catholic bishop of Bunia spoke of the Banyabwisha presence in the territories of Irumu and Djugu as well as in the vicinity of Bunia as a factor likely to fuel violence.[67] On 12 July 2019, the governor echoed this assessment.[68]

Hutu migration also worsens tensions across the region and in North Kivu province. Some local authorities suspect the Banyabwisha to be part of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda militia (Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda, or FDLR), which is hostile to the Rwandan government and accused by Kigali of receiving Ugandan support.[69] The migration of Hutu and possibly FDLR members from North Kivu to Ituri is also a contentious issue for the other large community in North Kivu, the Nande, many of whom are established in Ituri as traders and landowners. The Nande accuse Hutu migrants of participating in massacres in the Beni area of North Kivu.[70]

These movements between the two provinces also contributed to the spread of Ebola in 2018 and, today, potentially to that of COVID-19, complicating not only measures to eradicate violence, but also the fight against the disease. On 27 March, the National Biomedical Research Institute of Kinshasa, responsible for managing the pandemic, announced the first COVID-19 case in the territory of Irumu, which shares its southern border with North Kivu.[71] Other cases have since been recorded in the territories of Mahagi and Aru, north of Ituri.[72] The province has only recently recovered from the Ebola epidemic that ravaged the territory of Mambasa, which borders Beni, the North Kivu territory that was an epicentre of that disease. In Beni, as in Ituri, the Ebola response was hindered by armed groups' attacks on the medical personnel in charge and their facilities. The epidemic reappeared in Beni on 10 April 2020, raising renewed concerns about a possible spread to Ituri.[73]

Though Kampala closed the Ugandan border, and North Kivu is allowing only limited movement between provinces, COVID-19 could quickly spread throughout Ituri. CODECO attacks could deprive entire populations of aid due to the inaccessibility of certain areas and security constraints. The equipment available to help fight

[65] Crisis Group interview, senior government official, Kinshasa, February 2020.

[66] Confidential diplomatic document, consulted in February 2018.

[67] Bishop Dieudonné Uringi, "Message aux chrétiens et à tous les hommes de bonne volonté de l'Ituri et de Djugu", Bunia, 22 June 2019.

[68] The governor affirms that the massive presence of Banyabwisha in Irumu contributes to the violence. "Ituri : Jean Bamanisa appelle la population à l'unité face aux violences à Djugu", Actualité. cd, 12 July 2019.

[69] Crisis Group analyst's interview in a previous capacity, local Ituri territory administrators, January 2017; Rwandan intelligence sources, August-December 2018.

[70] "RDC : Tensions entre Hutus et Nandes font craindre une explosion au Nord-Kivu", La Libre Afrique, 6 June 2017. Crisis Group analyst's interviews in a previous capacity, Nande national deputies, December 2018.

[71] "Covid-19 en Ituri : la réaction de la population de Bunia après le premier cas testé positif", Actualité.cd, 30 March 2020.

[72] "Ituri : deux nouveaux cas positifs de Coronavirus", Radio Okapi, 25 April 2020.

[73] "New Ebola Case Confirmed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo", World Health Organization, 10 April 2020.

the coronavirus is also limited. As in almost all DRC regions, health infrastructure is inadequate or non-existent; in Ituri, it was destroyed by successive waves of violence. Displaced people live in overcrowded makeshift camps, in dreadful conditions, and many have to travel in search of food.[74] Continued militia attacks could prevent most aid workers from reaching them and helping them protect themselves against COVID-19.

D.   *Rebel Networks Based Outside Ituri*

Rwanda and Uganda both have historical ties to armed groups and rebellions in Ituri and North Kivu. Rwanda, which borders North Kivu, has had greater involvement there, while Uganda has played a bigger role in Ituri. Several Congolese actors who were active in previous Congo wars are involved in the conflict in Ituri and operate from Uganda.[75]

Among these different actors, former members of the Congolese Rally for Democracy-Kisangani/Liberation Movement (Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Kisangani/Mouvement de Libération, or RCD-K/ML) play a leading role. During the 1998-2003 war, this predominantly Nande group, led by former rebel leader Mbusa Nyamwisi and supported by Uganda, controlled parts of North Kivu and Ituri.[76] Some of its members are still based in Uganda, in plain view of the authorities, and maintain contact with armed groups active in North Kivu and Ituri.[77] Tshisekedi's election and the return of Nyamwisi to the DRC after years of exile in Uganda have improved relations with Kinshasa, but some former RCD-K/ML rebels nevertheless express their disappointment with the new government. Opponents of Kabila, these former rebels believe that the former president's clan still dominates the power structure.[78] Nyamwisi left the country once again when he realised, contrary to what he had hoped, that he would not obtain a position in the Tshisekedi government.

According to Congolese security services and representatives of armed groups based in Uganda, some members of the former M23 rebel movement established in Uganda are also involved in the Ituri attacks.[79] In December 2017, when that violence flared up, armed elements – identified by Congolese authorities as ex-M23 members – allegedly infiltrated Walendu-Bindi (Irumu territory in Ituri) from the

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[74] "Displaced by Community Violence, Living in Dire Conditions in Ituri Province", Doctors without Borders, 7 February 2020.

[75] Crisis Group interviews, representatives of armed groups, Kampala, July 2019.

[76] See "Uganda's heart of darkness", Al Jazeera, 24 December 2013.

[77] Crisis Group analyst's interview in a previous capacity, armed group representatives including former RCD-K/ML members, November 2017, May, July and November 2018. Before the rise of violence in December 2017, a former RCD-K/ML member informed this analyst that violence would intensify; Crisis Group interview, senior Ugandan official, December 2019.

[78] Crisis Group interviews, representatives of armed groups, Kampala, July 2019.

[79] Crisis Group analyst's research in a previous capacity, November 2018. Established following a mutiny by part of the Congolese armed forces and supported by Rwanda and Uganda, the M23 occupied part of North Kivu at the end of 2012, before being defeated by the national army and the UN mission in February 2013. The combatants fled in two groups, the majority to Uganda and the others to Rwanda, where they await repatriation under the terms of the peace agreement signed with Kinshasa in December 2013.

Kamango region in North Kivu via Tchabi, on the border of the two provinces.[80] The movement of former M23 members across the Ugandan border into Aru and Djugu territories in Ituri in 2018 was confirmed by Congolese security officials, who also apprehended certain ex-M23 members as they infiltrated the Berunda forest in Ituri. The interrogations reportedly confirmed the existence of a recruitment network for former M23 members in Uganda.[81]

At the same time, Rwandan intelligence services have accused Uganda of stoking violence in Ituri as part of a larger destabilisation plan that would affect North Kivu and ultimately Rwanda's security.[82] Kampala has always denied these allegations, while it accuses Kigali of supporting the ADF in North Kivu, an accusation which Rwanda also rejects.[83] While it is difficult at this stage to determine the scale of recruitment and exfiltration operations of former rebels toward Ituri, at the local level, certain political leaders and members of civil society remain convinced that links exist between the violence in Ituri and the involvement of external actors.[84]

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[80] Crisis Group analyst's interviews in a previous capacity, Congolese intelligence officer, Bunia, November 2018; former M23 members, Goma, February 2018.

[81] "Compte rendu de l'interrogatoire des 4 éléments M23 et 1 civil, arrêtés à Kadilo/territoire Mahagi en date du 1er avril 2018", Provincial Security Committee, Ituri province. Crisis Group interviews, former M23 member, MONUSCO official, August and October 2019.

[82] Crisis Group analyst's interview in a previous capacity, Rwandan intelligence official, Kigali, October 2018.

[83] Crisis Group interviews, senior Rwandan official, September 2019; senior Ugandan official, December 2019.

[84] Crisis Group interviews, Bunia, July 2019; Kinshasa, October 2019.

V. Stopping the Spiral of Violence

Restoring peace in the eastern DRC, including in Ituri, is a priority for President Tshisekedi. He travelled to Bunia on 30 June 2019, the country's Independence Day, to display his solidarity with the victims of violence. He promised to end the fighting. But the situation in the province remains fragile. The president should focus his efforts on disarming the CODECO militias and their allies, which would require more extensive dialogue with the Lendu and Hema communities, in particular regarding the conflict's underlying causes. He should also consult with neighbouring countries to ensure that militias and violent actors in Ituri are deprived of material and political support from outside the country.

A. *Disarmament Negotiations*

The government should pursue dialogue with the militias involved in the Ituri clashes in order to convince them to join reintegration programs that will facilitate their return to civilian life.

The government already initiated dialogue with CODECO in 2019, but civil society and prominent Hema figures urged the authorities to pursue legal proceedings in parallel.[85] The provincial authorities and Justin Ngudjolo were in contact in September 2019, by means of a so-called pacification commission composed of the head of Walendu-Pitsi sector, a member of the association Liberation of the Oppressed Race in Ituri (LORI, bringing together members of the Lendu community), a women's delegate and a youth representative. Ngudjolo presented his conditions for surrender and a ceasefire, including amnesty and recognition of the militiamen's ranks within the army.[86] At the same time, however, Governor Bamanisa published a list of CODECO officers and called for their arrest, a request widely supported by civil society and the Hema.[87]

The military operations against the militias which began in June 2019 have shown their limits. Lendu attackers regained territory after most army units were redeployed in January 2020. They even intensified their attacks after the signature of a peace agreement between the national government and the FRPI Lendu militia in February 2020.[88] After several years of negotiations, the FRPI militia — long active in Irumu territory south of Ituri — was finally granted the conditions that CODECO militiamen now demand: amnesty and integration into the national army.[89]

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[85] "Ituri : dialogue entre le gouvernement provincial et le groupe armé CODECO à Djugu", Radio Okapi, 24 September 2019; Crisis Group interviews, prominent Hema figures, Kinshasa, October 2019.
[86] While the LORI association helped to spread ethnic hatred at its creation in the early 1990s, today it is committed to reconciliation and the promotion of peace in Ituri, particularly through intercommunal dialogue. The equivalent on the Hema side is the ENTE association. "Ituri : dialogue entre le gouvernement provincial et le groupe armé Codeco à Djugu", Radio Okapi, 24 September 2019.
[87] Crisis Group interviews, civil society actors, Bunia, July 2019; prominent Hema figures, Kinshasa, October 2019.
[88] On 1 March, at least twenty people were killed at Kparangaza in fighting between the national army and CODECO; on 14 March, CODECO assailants killed five Hema at Juna, Bahema-Nord; on 16 March, fifteen other people were massacred at Dhego and Banana, in Bahema-Bajere.
[89] Agreement between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri (Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri, FRPI), 28 February 2020.

Following Ngudjolo's death in late March 2020, his successor as head of CODE-CO, Olivier Ngabu Ngawi, held a press briefing at the provincial governor's office on 4 May. He called on combatants to stop fighting and asked the national army for a ceasefire to facilitate negotiations with Kinshasa.[90] But not all CODECO militiamen heeded the new rebel leader's call for peace; attacks picked up pace, resulting in eleven deaths in a coordinated attack on 14 May in the territories of Djugu and Mahagi.[91] It is too early to say whether negotiations could resume in the near future and under what conditions.

Paradoxically, the agreement with the FRPI could complicate negotiations with members of CODECO and other militias. Authorities are now less open to the idea of integrating Ituri militias into an army already saturated with former rebels and militiamen. Tshisekedi's challenge will be to convince the militias to agree to a surrender without offering them integration into the army. To do so, he will need the support of Ituri's Lendu community, which has already demonstrated its ability to bring CODECO to the table. Lendu backing would put pressure on the militias and encourage them to accept the only viable option: a return to civilian life.

With regard to amnesty, however, the government will have to offer militias the same conditions as those granted to the FRPI, notably selection on a case-by-case basis, excluding actors guilty of serious crimes who must be brought to justice.[92] Tshisekedi will have to try to convince the Hema to support this process, despite their fundamental opposition to an amnesty.

To speed up this process, the president should both facilitate and finance the dialogue between the Hema and Lendu with the support of the Ituri deputies' caucus. The goal is to reach a broad consensus on disarmament methods and amnesty issues regarding CODECO and the other militias. MONUSCO has said it is ready to contribute to the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process, which it sees as an important step in preparing for its withdrawal from the country, provided that this does not lead to impunity being granted to criminals.[93]

B.   *Reintegration into Civilian Life*

The main reason for the failure of previous DDR programs was the Congolese authorities' lack of political commitment and inability to resolve the problems underlying the violence. Authorities were reluctant to commit state funds to these programs, and some politicians continued to support a number of rebel groups, using them as auxiliary troops and deploying them back into the field. Furthermore, the programs

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[90] "Ituri : reddition du chef de la milice Codeco qui appelle à la cessation des hostilités", Bunia Actualité, 5 May 2020. Tweet by Ituri Province, @provinceituri, official account of the provincial government of Ituri, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 6:26pm, 4 May 2020.
[91] "Ituri : au moins 11 morts dans une double attaque des assaillants de Codeco à Mahagi et Djugu", Bunia Actualité, 15 May 2020.
[92] The agreement between the government and the FRPI excludes the following from the scope of the amnesty: "war crimes, crimes against humanity, serious human rights violations, rape, sexual violence and crimes of genocide".
[93] Crisis Group interview, MONUSCO representative, Nairobi, July 2019; and "DR Congo President and UN chief meet at a 'historic moment' for democracy in the country", UN Info, 2 September 2019.

never addressed the root causes of violence such as unequal access to land and the lack of economic opportunities for young people.[94]

The government will have to formulate concrete proposals to ensure more lasting peace and to compensate the militiamen who are unlikely to obtain military posts. In particular, it should offer them economic opportunities to avoid the phenomenon of cyclical return, a "back-and-forth between civilian and militia life" which has characterised the eastern DRC for several years.[95] To achieve this aim, DDR programs must rely on structures that can offer training adapted to the economic needs of demobilised militiamen. If they were confident that they could make a living in a non-violent manner, most militiamen would join the process.[96] Before the COVID-19 epidemic, some donors were willing to finance such a process provided that the government actively contributed to it.[97]

The government could also set up specific programs for populations distressed by years of violence. Psychological support and healing programs, both for perpetrators and victims, would help mitigate the trauma. Similar experiments seem to have paid off in other countries that have suffered calamity, including Sierra Leone after its 1991-2002 civil war and Liberia following its 2014 Ebola epidemic. Ituri could be a pilot province in the DRC, but these programs could then be expanded to other areas affected by violence.[98]

C.   *Local and Provincial Dialogues*

The negotiations initiated with militias by the provincial government of Ituri are only a first step toward ending the violence. They should be immediately followed by dialogue between local chiefs and other prominent figures in the areas most affected by the conflict in Djugu territory, the hotbed of the crisis, such as Walendu-Pitsi, Walendu-Tatsi, Bahema-Nord and Bahema-Banywagi. In particular, the provincial government should encourage chiefs to consult regularly to identify difficulties at the local level that tend to spark violence — such as land disputes and access to natural resources — and to propose prevention and security measures.

In addition, a dialogue encompassing all the Ituri communities — including those not directly involved in the current crisis — could tackle the province's problems comprehensively rather than limiting talks to Lendu-Hema disputes. This dialogue should focus on questions of management and allocation of public resources; without transparency and equity, these issues risk becoming a source of intercommunal conflict.

National authorities should allocate significant financial resources to help Ituri face these manifold challenges, particularly regarding community development and security. To this end, Kinshasa should mobilise its traditional bilateral partners, such as the U.S., the UK and France, as well as the World Bank, to contribute to a special

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[94] Crisis Group interview, Kinshasa-based diplomat, May 2020.

[95] Koen Vlassenroot, Emery Mudinga and Josaphat Musamba, "Retour circulaire : navigation entre la vie de civil et de milicien à l'est de la RDC", Groupe d'études sur les conflits et la sécurité humaine, 12 March 2020.

[96] Crisis Group interviews, civil society actors, Bunia, July 2019; prominent figures from Ituri, Kinshasa, October 2019.

[97] Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Kinshasa, October 2019.

[98] Crisis Group interview, prominent figures from Ituri, Kinshasa, October 2019.

fund for Ituri. The battle with COVID-19 will undoubtedly draw a large part of the available funds, but there is still a chance that restoring peace in Ituri will remain both a national and international priority.

D.   *A Constructive Role for Border Countries*

In response to reciprocal accusations between neighbouring countries – notably Rwanda and Uganda – and to end the support these countries provide to cross-border armed groups, Tshisekedi should place regional diplomacy at the core of his strategy.[99]

With this in mind, the Quadripartite Summit (Angola, the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda), which met for the first time in Luanda on 12 July 2019, can serve as a useful framework to ease tensions between Kampala and Kigali and defuse the situation in Ituri. Although informal and limited, this summit – initiated by Tshisekedi and his Angolan counterpart Lourenço – is part of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). This intergovernmental body composed of the region's states is one of the guarantors of the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement.[100] The Quadripartite Summit previously focused on bilateral tensions between Rwanda and Uganda, as well as on the role of armed groups in North Kivu. The two presidents, Tshisekedi and Lourenço, should now put the Ituri conflict on the agenda, and thus acknowledge its regional dimension.

As Crisis Group has previously recommended, the summit should marshal UN and Security Council member states' support to press Rwanda and Uganda to detail their respective allegations, replete with evidence, of material and political support to armed groups in the eastern DRC, including in Ituri.[101] Subsequently, the UN Group of Experts on the DRC (mandated by the Security Council to investigate allegations of support for armed groups and to disclose evidence) could look into these claims, along with the ICGLR's Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism (which has the same mandate at the regional level).[102] These enquiries could help the mediators assisting in the summit to push Rwanda and Uganda to openly discuss their mutual accusations of support for armed groups in the eastern DRC, with a view to agreeing to end this support. The situation in Ituri should be debated during these discussions.

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[99] See Crisis Group Briefing, *Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes*, op. cit.
[100] The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) was established in 2000 following numerous regional political conflicts in the 1990s. It includes twelve member states: Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the DRC, Kenya, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. On 24 February 2013 in Addis Ababa, eleven countries signed the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region to end the recurring cycles of conflict. It provides for the appointment of a UN special envoy. The framework agreement bids countries in the region "to neither tolerate nor provide assistance or support of any kind to armed groups".
[101] See Crisis Group Briefing, *Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes*, op. cit.
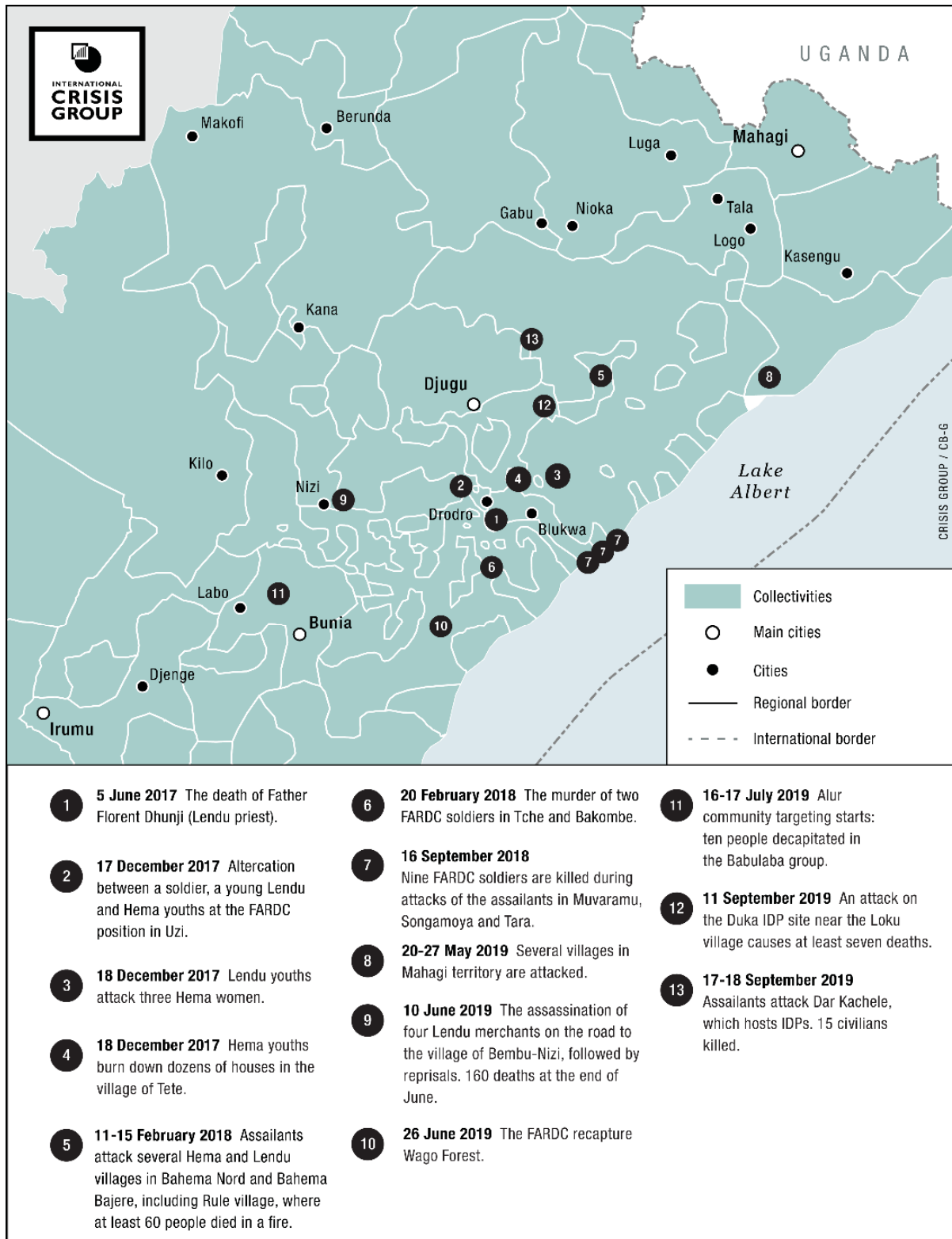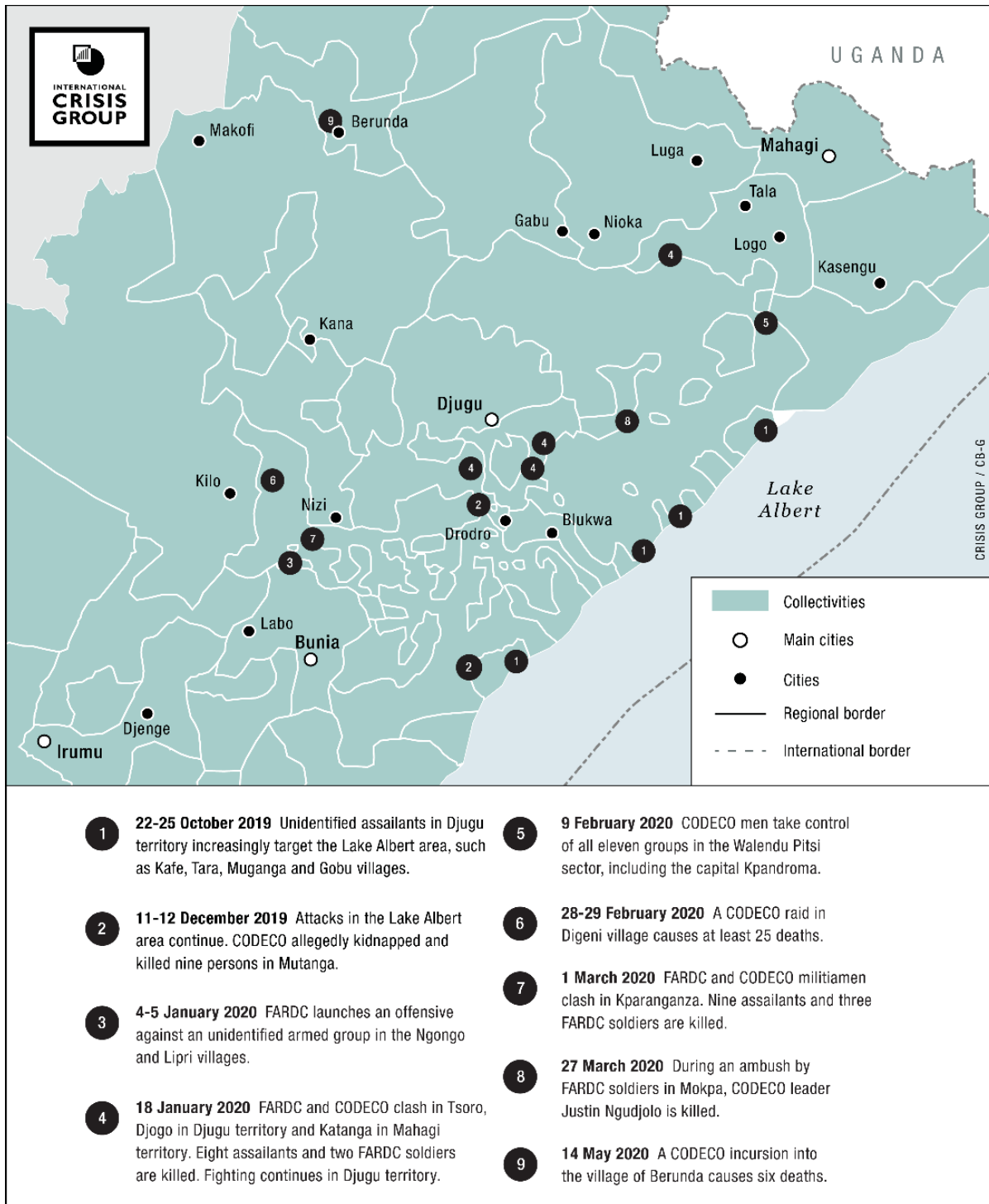[102] Ibid.

VI.   Conclusion

The conflict in Ituri, an area rich in natural resources where weapons and former warlords circulate, could lead to an escalation of violence. Since December 2017, the authorities and the local population have been concerned about this crisis, which could worsen and claim many lives. In addition, interactions with armed groups in North Kivu and the involvement of neighbouring countries raise fears that the crisis could spread. Tshisekedi has prioritised ending the violence in the eastern DRC, including the conflict in Ituri, whose resolution would be a boon for his presidency. To carry out this immense project, and finance it, he will need the support of the DRC's national and international partners as well as regional states.

Nairobi/Bunia/Kinshasa/Kampala/Brussels, 15 July 2020

Appendix A: Maps of the Principal Ituri Localities Mentioned in the Report

U G A N D A

Makofi

Berunda

Luga

Mahagi

Gabu · Nioka

Tala

Logo

Kasengu

Kana

13

Djugu

5

12

Kilo

Nizi · 9

2 · 4 · 3

Drodro · 1

Blukwa

7 · 7

Lake Albert

6

7

Labo · 11

Bunia

10

Djenge

Irumu

CRISIS GROUP / CB-G

Collectivities

○ Main cities

● Cities

── Regional border

– – – International border

1 5 June 2017 The death of Father Florent Dhunji (Lendu priest).

2 17 December 2017 Altercation between a soldier, a young Lendu and Hema youths at the FARDC position in Uzi.

3 18 December 2017 Lendu youths attack three Hema women.

4 18 December 2017 Hema youths burn down dozens of houses in the village of Tete.

5 11-15 February 2018 Assailants attack several Hema and Lendu villages in Bahema Nord and Bahema Bajere, including Rule village, where at least 60 people died in a fire.

6 20 February 2018 The murder of two FARDC soldiers in Tche and Bakombe.

7 16 September 2018 Nine FARDC soldiers are killed during attacks of the assailants in Muvaramu, Songamoya and Tara.

8 20-27 May 2019 Several villages in Mahagi territory are attacked.

9 10 June 2019 The assassination of four Lendu merchants on the road to the village of Bembu-Nizi, followed by reprisals. 160 deaths at the end of June.

10 26 June 2019 The FARDC recapture Wago Forest.

11 16-17 July 2019 Alur community targeting starts: ten people decapitated in the Babulaba group.

12 11 September 2019 An attack on the Duka IDP site near the Loku village causes at least seven deaths.

13 17-18 September 2019 Assailants attack Dar Kachele, which hosts IDPs. 15 civilians killed.

22-25 October 2019 Unidentified assailants in Djugu territory increasingly target the Lake Albert area, such as Kafe, Tara, Muganga and Gobu villages.

11-12 December 2019 Attacks in the Lake Albert area continue. CODECO allegedly kidnapped and killed nine persons in Mutanga.

4-5 January 2020 FARDC launches an offensive against an unidentified armed group in the Ngongo and Lipri villages.

18 January 2020 FARDC and CODECO clash in Tsoro, Djogo in Djugu territory and Katanga in Mahagi territory. Eight assailants and two FARDC soldiers are killed. Fighting continues in Djugu territory.

9 February 2020 CODECO men take control of all eleven groups in the Walendu Pitsi sector, including the capital Kpandroma.

28-29 February 2020 A CODECO raid in Digeni village causes at least 25 deaths.

1 March 2020 FARDC and CODECO militiamen clash in Kparanganza. Nine assailants and three FARDC soldiers are killed.

27 March 2020 During an ambush by FARDC soldiers in Mokpa, CODECO leader Justin Ngudjolo is killed.

14 May 2020 A CODECO incursion into the village of Berunda causes six deaths.

Appendix B: Chronology

5 June 2017: The death of a priest triggers intercommunal tensions
The Lendu suspect Hema abbots of killing Father Florent Dhunji (a Lendu priest) during his visit to the parish of Drodro. This event leads to a rise in intercommunal tensions, a prelude to the violence.

17-18 December 2017: An altercation triggers a cycle of reprisals
After an altercation between a soldier and a young Lendu man in Djugu territory on 15 December, Hema youths pursue and beat up the young man. The next day, young Lendu retaliate by attacking three Hema women with machetes; in response, Hema youths from Maze and Dhedja burn down several dozen houses in the village of Tete.

21 December 2017: A local pacification initiative leads to a lull in violence
The governor of Ituri, Pene Baka, sends a pacification delegation first to Blukwa-Mbi (Walendu-Pitsi) and then to Blukwa-State (Bahema-Nord). It results in a period of relative calm that lasts until February 2018.

February-March 2018: A new wave of deadly attacks begins
On 10 February, unidentified assailants attack several villages in Bahema-Nord and Bahema-Bajere, including the village of Rule, where at least 60 people die in a fire. The attackers now also target defence forces. On 20 February, alleged Lendu attackers kill two soldiers in the villages of Tche (Bahema-Nord) and Bakombe (Walendu Djatsi). Intercommunal violence continues. During simultaneous attacks in Maze and Beliba (Bahema-Nord) on 1 March, at least 36 people are killed.

10 June 2019: A new cycle of violence begins
The killing of four Lendu traders on the road to Bembu-Nizi village provokes bloody acts of revenge in the form of several massacres and arsons in Djugu territory. By the end of June, 160 people are dead and around 360,000 displaced. On 21 June, armed forces launch Operation Zaruba ya Ituri, during which they liberate several localities, including, on 26 June, Wago forest, considered to be the militiamen's sanctuary.

12 June 2019: The alleged leader of the CODECO militia is identified
At a press conference in Bunia, the Congolese armed forces announce that they have identified the leader of the CODECO militia, "a certain Ngudjolo".

20 June 2019: Yves Mandro Kahwa Panga becomes a dialogue partner in Ituri, after years of exile in Uganda
The former militia leader Yves Mandro Kahwa Panga returns to the DRC to support the provincial government in promoting peace among the Hema and Lendu.

29 June-2 July 2019: President Félix Tshisekedi visits Ituri
President Félix Tshisekedi's visit to Ituri in Bunia and Djugu on the occasion of the commemoration of independence brings the Ituri crisis to the forefront of the political scene in the DRC.

12 July 2019: Bamanisa describes the involvement of the Banyabwisha in the violence
The governor of Ituri, Jean Bamanisa, explains that the "massive presence of the Banyabwisha in Irumu territory" contributes to the violence in Ituri. The Banyabwisha are Hutu migrants from North Kivu.

July-September 2019: Attacks spread beyond Djugu territory
The attacks become more widespread. The territories of Mahagi and Irumu are affected and the Alur community is targeted. On 16 July, militiamen kill eight Alur in Irumu territory, and two others the following day. In September, MONUSCO reports six attacks in Djugu and Mahagi territories over a fortnight, with around ten people killed. There are also reports of attacks on IDP camps, such as one near the locality of Roe, targeted on 18 September.

September-October 2019: Peace efforts

On 22 September, the governor of Ituri province reveals the voter card of a certain Justin Ngudjolo Duduko, suspected of being the leader of the CODECO militia. On 21 September in Dyaro, at a meeting with the monitoring committee for the pacification of Ituri province, Ngudjolo expresses the intention to lay down his arms in exchange for amnesty and integration into the army. On 1 October, the provincial government agrees to negotiate with Ngudjolo but rejects the idea of an amnesty. On 18 October 2019, provincial authorities and the Lendu sign a Deed of Commitment in Réthy. It commits the Lendu to act in favour of peace.

November-December 2019: Peace efforts are paralysed, amid a fresh outbreak of attacks by CODECO

Peace efforts are at a standstill. The provincial assembly of Ituri province removes Governor Jean Bamanisa from his position for mismanagement, complicating efforts to restore peace in Ituri since he is considered to be a neutral party. CODECO resumes attacks in several villages in Djugu territory. CODECO targets more localities on the shores of Lake Albert in December.

January 2020: CODECO regains ground

CODECO regains control over several localities in Djugu territory following the redeployment of units due to escalating violence in the neighbouring North Kivu province. On 23 January 2020, 22 villages in the chiefdoms of Bahema-Bajere and Bahema-Nord, in Djugu territory, fall under the militia's control. CODECO takes over the entire Walendu-Pitsi sector in Djugu, including the capital Kpandroma, and two groupments of the Mokambo chiefdom in Mahagi territory.

28 January 2020: The Union of Revolutionaries for the Defence of the Congolese People (URPDC) claims responsibility for the attacks in Ituri, rejecting the name "CODECO"

The URPDC, an organisation with mostly Lendu members which defines itself as a political and military movement, claims responsibility for attacks carried out in Djugu territory and rejects the designations "CODECO" and "Ngudjolo armed group".

February-March 2020: The peace agreement with the FRPI provokes attacks by CODECO/URPDC

On 7 February 2020, Jean Bamanisa is reinstated as governor, with his return potentially relaunching dialogue. On 17 March, intelligence services arrest Raymond Tseni Adrionzi and Joseph Amula (aka Kesta), the alleged leaders of the URPDC, in Alha in the Walendu-Pitsi sector; on 29 March, they are transferred to Kinshasa. A peace agreement is signed between the Congolese government and the Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri (FRPI) on 28 February, triggering new attacks by CODECO/URPDC, since the FRPI obtained the conditions also demanded by CODECO. The presumed leader, Justin Ngudjolo, dies on 27 March, following an army ambush in Mokpa. On 28 March, the army takes back Kpandroma in Walendu-Pitsi. Militiamen retaliate the same day by attacking several villages in Bahema-Nord. On 27 March, the National Biomedical Research Institute of Kinshasa confirms the first COVID-19 case in Ituri, in Irumu territory. As of then, the virus spreads in Ituri.

April-May 2020: Attacks are relaunched after the death of CODECO leader Justin Ngudjolo

Following Justin Ngudjolo's death, all dialogue between the militia and the authorities is suspended. The CODECO group steps up its attacks and regains control of Djugu territories. On 4 May, Ngudjolo's successor at the head of CODECO, Olivier Ngabu Ngawi, holds a press conference at the provincial governor's office: he calls on CODECO fighters to stop their attacks and asks the authorities for a ceasefire. But the attacks continue and are repelled by the army as part of Operation Zaruba ya Ituri 2. On 20 May, the European Union releases a statement calling on Congolese authorities and MONUSCO to end CODECO violence.

Appendix C: Acronyms

ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
CODECO	Cooperative for the Development of the Congo
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
ENTE	Hema cultural association
FNI	Nationalist and Integrationist Front (French acronym)
FARDC	Democratic Republic of the Congo Armed Forces (French acronym)
FRPI	Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri (French acronym)
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
LORI	Liberation of the Oppressed Race in Ituri (Lendu cultural association)
M23	23 March Movement
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PUSIC	Party for Unity and Safeguarding of the Integrity of Congo
RCD-K/ML	Congolese Rally for Democracy-Kisangani/Liberation Movement (French acronym)
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNJHRO	United Nations Joint Human Rights Office
URPDC	Union of Revolutionaries for the Defence of the Congolese People (French acronym)

Appendix D: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

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July 2020

Appendix E: Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2017

Special Reports and Briefings

Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy, Special Briefing N°1, 30 April 2019.

Seven Opportunities for the UN in 2019-2020, Special Briefing N°2, 12 September 2019.

Seven Priorities for the New EU High Representative, Special Briefing N°3, 12 December 2019.

COVID-19 and Conflict: Seven Trends to Watch, Special Briefing N°4, 24 March 2020 (also available in French and Spanish).

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The Price of Peace: Securing UN Financing for AU Peace Operations, Africa Report N°286, 31 January 2020.

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Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures, Africa Report N°246, 8 March 2017 (also available in French).

Burundi: The Army in Crisis, Africa Report N°247, 5 April 2017 (also available in French).

Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads, Africa Report N°250, 2 August 2017 (also available in French).

Avoiding the Worst in Central African Republic, Africa Report N°253, 28 September 2017 (also available in French).

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Cameroon's Far North: Reconstruction amid Ongoing Conflict, Africa Briefing N°133, 25 October 2017 (also available in French).

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Helping the Burundian People Cope with the Economic Crisis, Africa Report N°264, 31 August 2018 (also available in French).

Cameroon: Divisions Widen Ahead of Presidential Vote, Africa Briefing N°142, 3 October 2018 (also available in French).

Chad: Defusing Tensions in the Sahel, Africa Report N°266, 5 December 2018 (also available in French).

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Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick, Africa Report N°277, 18 June 2019 (also available in French).

Running Out of Options in Burundi, Africa Report N°278, 20 June 2019 (also available in French).

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Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DdR Congo and Great Lakes, Africa Briefing N°150, 23 January 2020 (also available in French).

A First Step Toward Reform: Ending Burundi's Forced Contribution System, Africa Briefing N°153, 8 April 2020 (also available in French).

Mineral Concessions: Avoiding Conflict in DR Congo's Mining Heartland, Africa Report N°290, 30 June 2020 (also available in French).

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Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails, Africa Report N°283, 16 December 2019.

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Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram, Africa Report N°244, 23 February 2017.

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Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province, Africa Report N°273, 16 May 2019.

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Appendix F: International Crisis Group Board of Trustees