Africa

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Africa is one of the continents hardest hit by climate change – and marginalized minorities are likely to be among the most vulnerable of all. According to data released in 2007 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), by 2020 between 75 million and 250 million people in Africa are expected to be suffering from increased water stress due to climate change. The IPCC also predicts that climatic developments make it likely that food production could halve by 2020, with the Sahel, arid but relatively densely populated, among the most exposed of regions (*Fourth Assessment Report*, October 2007). The resultant strain upon available resources would impact in particular upon the pre-existing tensions between farmers and transhumant pastoralists, with potentially severe consequences for minorities across the region, such as the Peul/Fulani, Mbororo and Tuareg and related groups. Similarly, the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) *Human Development Report* for 2006 identifies drought-prone countries in Southern Africa – Angola, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe as having the 'gravest food security challenges in the world'.

Some communities are already experiencing this, first-hand. In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, the Afar and the Somali in Ethiopia, and pastoralists like the Karamajong in Uganda, are already grappling with the reality of more frequent cycles of drought. Cross-border flare-ups between the cattle-herding tribes of the Horn of Africa, testify to the potential for conflict, as competition for scarce resources intensifies. In an October 2007 report, UNICEF reported that half of the total stock holding of pastoralists in the Horn of Africa had been wiped out, and that 'repeated bouts of drought have defeated pastoralists' capacities to recover their stock level'. UNICEF explicitly linked political marginalization of the pastoralists to the fact that governments and the international community fail to put in place services that would help mitigate the effects of drought (*Global Alert: Pastoralist Child*).

The freak rains which hit the continent, east to west in 2007, showed that the growing unpredictability of weather events is a further factor to which minority groups would be particularly exposed. The IPCC notes that low development levels, weak economies and poor governance records impact on the ability of states and communities to combat climate change. However, it did hold out the possibility that some nomadic groups, already highly attuned to vagaries of the weather system, may in fact be better able to develop adaptive strategies than other communities (*Fourth Assessment Report*, October 2007).

Apart from the looming threat of climate change, conflict with an ethnic dimension, was, once again, the biggest immediate threat to minorities across the continent. In Ethiopia, the government launched an offensive against ethnic Somali rebels in the Ogaden region, after a rebel attack on an oil exploration site. The security forces' tactics – such as a food blockade and burning villages – attracted international criticism for indiscriminately affecting civilians. In Sudan, the unravelling of a key peace deal between Khartoum and the former Southern rebels, opened up the possibility of renewed warfare, while there were also new signs of restiveness in the north among the Nubian and Manassir peoples. The catastrophe in Darfur worsened, despite renewed efforts by the international community. Worryingly, the disruptive effects of this war are spreading, not just into neighbouring Chad and Central Africa Republic, but also within Sudan itself. In Somalia, clan-based warfare intensified, as the struggle between the supporters of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and the transitional government, backed by the Ethiopians continued. As predicted in *SWM 2007*, the fighting sparked a severe humanitarian crisis, with the United Nations (UN) estimating over 1,000 killed and 400,000 displaced in October 2007.

The difficulties of managing tourism development while still respecting the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples emerged as another powerful theme in 2007. For example, the plight of the Hadzabe hunter-gatherers close to the Serengeti plains in Tanzania is typical. According to reports in June 2007, the Tanzanian government struck a deal to lease the land, which was traditionally occupied by the Hadzabe, to a safari company from the United Arab Emirates. Although the deal supposedly included the development of roads and education facilities, the Hadzabe – who number around 1,500 – were not consulted on it, and were reportedly opposed to it. Following a campaign by indigenous activists, Survival International reported in November 2007 that the safari company had withdrawn from the project. However, the pattern of ignoring the rights of minorities when considering tourism issues was also evident in Botswana, Kenya and Uganda (see individual country profiles).

Country by country

Algeria

Parliamentary elections in May 2007 were only the third democratic poll to be held since 1992, when the army cancelled the first multi-party elections which were won by the fundamentalist FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) party. The consequences of the ensuing civil war, marked by extreme brutality, are still being felt today. The Salafist militants, re-launched in 2007 as a branch of al-Qaeda, have their roots in the armed Islamic opposition to the Algerian state. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks across North Africa, including a series of bombings in Algeria, leaving many dead. In January 2007, it targeted security forces in the minority Berber area of Kabylia in north-eastern Algeria. According to BBC News, seven bombs were detonated and at least six people were killed.

Observers said the low turnout in the parliamentary poll reflected the electorate's understanding that power was concentrated in the hands of the presidency not the parliament. For the Berber minority – which makes up approximately 25 per cent of the Algerian population – grievances about recognition of their distinct language and cultural rights remain. Berber political parties were divided about whether to contest the elections: the Rally for Culture and Democracy gained 19 seats, re-entering parliament after a boycott in 2002. However, the Social Forces Front decided once again not to contest the election. About half of the Berber-speaking population is concentrated in the mountainous areas east of Algiers – Kabylia – and this area and its language have been at the centre of most Berber issues in modern Algeria. In 2001, riots and demonstrations erupted in the region, due to widespread claims of repression and marginalization. Since then, the government has promised more economic assistance and eased some restrictions on the use of Tamazight – the Berber language. In its 2007 report on Algeria, the US State Department noted that:

'Access to print and broadcast media for Tamazight and Amazigh culture continued to grow. Tamazight programming also increased on the non-Berber language channels, as did advertisements in Tamazight on all television and radio channels. Beginning in the 2006–2007 scholastic year, the Tamazight language was officially taught in primary schools, starting in the fourth grade in 17 predominantly Berber provinces.'

However, this progress still falls short of Tamazight being recognized as an 'official' language – as demanded by Berber campaigners. Moreover, there are complaints that, outside Kabylia, Berbers' linguistic and cultural rights continue to be restricted.

Botswana

The efforts by Botswana's minorities for recognition of their rights continued in 2007. Despite being a multi-ethnic state, comprised of 45 tribes, Botswana's laws and constitution continue to discriminate in favour of those from the dominant Tswana-speaking group. Most of the laws of Botswana recognize and protect the rights of the Tswana-speaking groups with regards to ethnic identity (including language and culture), land and chieftaincy. However no such recognition or protection is given to the non-Tswana-speaking ethnic groups in Botswana. Indeed, following independence in 1966, the only languages allowed for public purposes or in teaching were Setswana and English.

A 2001 High Court ruling in a case brought by the Wayeyi tribe, found that the exclusion of the Wayeyi from the House of Chiefs – an influential body which advises parliament – was discriminatory and unjustified. However, despite the ruling, the government's action purporting to remedy this discrimination has been far from satisfactory. In 2005, the Botswana parliament passed a constitutional amendment, dealing with membership of the House of Chiefs. However, the campaign group Reteng concluded that this merely further entrenched the inequalities. It noted that when the present House of Chiefs was inaugurated on 1 February 2007, of the 45 tribes, 20 remained entirely unrepresented. In June 2007, the National Assembly proposed the Bogosi bill, which if enacted, would repeal the Chieftaincy Act. However, campaigners say the proposals fall far short of what is required and still preserve the disproportionate influence of the Tswana tribes in the House of Chiefs.

Reteng and Minority Rights Group International (MRG) have submitted a case, based on the Wayeyi ruling, to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, located in the Gambia, alleging violations of the African Charter on Human and

Peoples' Rights. These include violations of the right to participate freely in government (Article 13), the right to freely take part in the cultural life of a community (Article 17) and the right to equality (Article 19).

The treatment of the San hunter-gatherers in Botswana continued to raise concerns in 2007. The San scored a historic victory at the end of 2006, when the High Court in Botswana ruled that forcible evictions from their ancestral lands in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in 2002 were illegal and unconstitutional, and that the ban on hunting was illegal. However, it became evident in 2007 that the Botswana government was intent on only allowing the narrowest interpretation of this ruling. It insists that the court's judgment only applied to those listed on the legal case papers, and there have been repeated arrests of San who have tried to hunt in the Reserve.

The court case followed progressive dispossession of the San of land which they have inhabited for thousands of years. The forces of modernization, economic imperatives (diamonds were discovered in the territory) and tourism have all been cited as reasons for the evictions of the San. Their subsequent existence in government resettlement camps, without access to the expanses of the Kalahari, has sounded the death-knell for their unique hunter-gatherer way of life.

Survival International reported in December 2007 that up to 150 people had managed to re-settle in the park despite the obstacles. But it is estimated that up to 1,000 more would like to go back. The non-governmental organization (NGO) said lack of adequate water supplies, lack of access to transport back to the reserve and undue pressure from government officials were preventing more people from returning (see also *Namibia*).

Burundi

Burundi's population is 85 per cent Hutu, approximately 14 per cent Tutsi and roughly 1 per cent Batwa. After the end of widespread hostilities in Burundi and the constitutional referendum and presidential election of 2005, the country has maintained a cautious path towards reconstruction and political stabilization during 2007, with considerable outside aid and diplomatic pressure. President Pierre Nkurunziza's majority Hutu government and legislature has been the main political force since the 2005 polls – overturning the previous dominance by the Tutsi minority. The government is faced with the challenge of developing a genuinely pluralistic politics and functioning civil society after nearly 50 years of deepening ethnic violence. Despite a peace agreement between the government and the last remaining Hutu rebel front, the National Liberation Front (FNL), in September 2006, a minority break-away wing of the FNL under the leadership of Agathon Rwasa, was still in conflict with government forces in late 2007, staging hit-and-run raids in and around Bujumbura.

Unlike neighbouring Rwanda, Burundi does recognize the distinct ethnicity of the Batwa. There are estimated to be between 30,000 and 40,000 Batwa living in the country. The 2005 constitution set aside three seats in the National Assembly and three seats in the Senate for Twa. Nonetheless this group are still mostly landless and are among the poorest people in what is a very poor country. In testimonies gathered by MRG in Burundi in 2007, Batwa complained of many difficulties relating to land rights, either through lack of title, discriminatory practices relating to allocation on the part of the authorities or failure to recognize historic rights to land. According to the Forest Peoples Programme, land laws in Burundi blatantly discriminate against Batwa, as they base customary land rights on 'actual and visible occupation of the land', while the traditional hunter-gather lifestyle tends to not visibly impact on territory. The new Land Commission in Burundi is tasked with sorting out the complex land issues which have arisen since the end of the conflict, and the return of many refugees. The Commission has one Batwa member, and it is hoped that it will tackle the question of the land rights of indigenous peoples. Aside from land issues, Batwa also complained to MRG about discrimination in social services, especially in health and education. In particular, the difficulty of educating Batwa children beyond primary level was highlighted. A survey undertaken by UNIPROBA – an organization representing the Burundian Batwa – found just seven Batwa students in university education in 2006.

Central African Republic

The impact of the interlocking wars and rebellions in the central African region was felt in CAR. Rebels from Chad and Darfur continue to operate from northern CAR, while the government of General François Bozizé has accused Khartoum of allowing rebels from CAR to base themselves in Darfur. In an attempt to contain the spreading effects of the Darfur war, the United Nations approved the deployment of a 3,700 strong peacekeeping force mainly to Chad, but also to Central African Republic in September 2007. The troops are to be drawn from European Union (EU) nations – and the goal is to protect civilians from cross-border attacks. However, by late 2007 the EU force had run into difficulties – in particular due to the reluctance of states to contribute vital military hardware, such as helicopters, to the mission.

Attention also focused in 2007 on the home-grown rebellions within the CAR. In the past few years, two revolts have been under way in the north: one in the north-east and one in the north-west. An estimated 200,000 civilians have fled their homes during this time – with some 50,000 seeking sanctuary in Cameroon and Chad. Government forces confronting the rebellions have been accused of widespread human rights abuses, including summary executions. While the insurgencies have different dynamics, overall the political and economic marginalization of the north is the dominant factor. In the remote and underdeveloped north-east, the rebellion centres on the Gula ethnic group. In a 2007 report, Human Rights Watch (HRW) describes their grievances as, variously, discrimination against the Gula, and alleged embezzlements of community payments by government officials. After an offensive where the rebel Gula-dominated UFDR seized key towns, government security forces, supported by the French military, struck back. According to HRW, most of the Gula population fled for fear of retaliation by the government forces. However, a peace deal signed in April 2007 between the UFDR and the government has stabilized the situation. In December 2007, the UN noted that, while the situation remained 'fragile', it had been sufficiently good for some displaced civilians to return home.

The difficulties in the north-west, are driven partly by followers of the former president Ange-Félix Patassé (who hails from this region), who feel excluded from political patronage of the Bozizé regime. The unrest is also driven partly by sheer lawlessness, embodied by bandits known as *zaraguinas*, whose activities lead local communities to seek protection from militias as well as fuelling discontent with the central government's inability to curb the criminal attacks. Cow-herding nomadic tribes, the Mbororo have particularly suffered in this prevailing atmosphere of lawlessness and rebellion across the north. Targeted for their wealth and livestock, many have fled to camps in southern Chad. In April 2007, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced the opening of a new refugee camp in Cameroon, following the flight of some 25,000 Mbororo from CAR. In a statement UNCHR said the Mbororo had been singled out 'relentlessly' by both bandits and rebels, and that 'a small number of those who managed to save some of their livestock continue to graze cattle inside Cameroon. But the others, having lost everything, are in an extremely precarious situation.' In November 2007, Amnesty International reported (*War Against Children in the Wild North*) on the pervasive practice of child abduction from Mbororo communities, for ransom. Some children have been abducted by *zaraguinas* more than 10 times. Girls are especially vulnerable; they may be held for months, and raped. Ransoms can be up to $10,000. Amnesty says that state security forces often fail to intervene, even when they are in a position to do so.

In the south of the country, the cultural survival of the forest-dwelling peoples of the CAR – the biggest group of which is the Aka – continues to be in question. UNESCO, which has recognized the unique polyphonic musical traditions of the Aka, warns that 'the scarcity of game resulting from deforestation, the rural exodus and the folklorization of their heritage for the tourist industry are the principal factors contributing to the gradual disappearance of many of their traditional customs, rituals and skills'. Illegal logging presents a huge problem for the Aka: even when logging is supposed to be state-controlled, and conservation measures are in place, there are difficulties. In a November 2007 report, the Forest Peoples Programme reports that in the Dzanga Protected Area Complex – where the Aka have some limited rights to hunt and pursue a traditional lifestyle – the younger generation is losing its forest knowledge, as development opportunities increase and the trend towards sedentarization takes hold. In all walks of life, the Aka still face deep-seated discrimination from other communities in the Central African Republic.

Songs, life in the forest and the struggle for acceptance

Matilde Ceravolo describes how the Aka Pygmies of Central African Republic came to learn about human rights.

'*So zo la, so zo la, zo kwe a'ke zo …*' – all around the Lobaye region, children going to school and women in front of their hearth, all sing a chirpy rhythm.

Aka Pygmies are renowned for being exceptional musicians. In their ancient oral traditions, ideas as well as stories have been diffused through easy-to-remember songs. This one means: 'This person here, and that one there, every person is a human being.'

That is not an obvious statement in the southern Central African Republic. Aka are normally considered as a bit less than human beings, something in between humans and monkeys. They are often regarded as private property, being 'owned' by the majority Bantu and used for hard farming tasks.

Once upon a time, when Aka were able to live on forest products, their relations with the Bantus were based on mutually advantageous trading arrangements. Aka would approach villages to exchange meat, fish, mushrooms and roots for semi-industrialized goods, such as cooking pots and matches. They would have a privileged relation with one specific Bantu family, but they were free to negotiate deals.

Since industrialized forest exploitation has begun, Aka have found it harder and harder to survive in the forest and have been forced to settle next to the villages, looking for seasonal jobs. Bantus have become their 'masters', deciding when to hire them, if and how much to pay. The traditional Pygmy values of living with no private property and their tradition of moving through the forests, with settled abodes, are seen by the Bantu as symptoms of under-civilization.

Targets of violence and discrimination

Misunderstandings between Aka and Bantus happen every day, and acts of violence are not uncommon.

Sanfami's daughter was beaten because she refused to work for a Bantu who had encountered her in the road. The baby she was carrying on her back, died as a consequence of the beating.

Aka men have been forced to work for leading citizens in the city of Bagandou, in Lobaye region. When human rights defenders approached, they were threatened with having one of the Aka killed in front of them.

Aka children at school are often victims of sneering from their schoolmates and are excluded from the class groups. At public health centres Aka are forced to allow all the other patients to be attended to before their turn comes.

Even the right to a nationality is denied to Aka. It is estimated that around 35,000 Aka live in the Central African Republic, while the official census of 2003 only registered 10,000 – the ones who were enrolled to vote at the presidential elections.

'Culturally unique'

Aka oral traditions have been declared as part of world heritage by UNESCO. Since then, the government has received funds to preserve their culture. Appreciable efforts have been made and the Ministry of Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture is working hard to improve the conditions of Aka Pygmies. However, the government tax that is charged for those visiting an Aka encampment, has not been used for the benefit of the communities.

The list of daily minority rights violations is long. Aka have been denied access to education: in the Lobaye region, only one Aka is known to have ever accessed secondary education, and this was under Emperor Bokassa, in the 1970s.

Learning about human rights

The Aka had never even heard about human rights until 2003, when the first project was funded by the European Commission and run by the Italian non-governmental organization (NGO) Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI). The first steps of the awareness- raising campaigns were very basic: a drawing representing a child, a man and an antelope. And the question: what is the difference between each of them? What is human? Are you human or animal? All that followed was developed from there, by the Aka themselves. Community leaders invented songs; they participated in public discussions; they manufactured objects to be exhibited in museums, contributing to the valorization of Aka culture. They created community-based organizations to promote human rights. They travelled to meet each other and to exchange lessons learned. They spoke on national radio broadcasts and answered questions at university conferences.

In October last year, at the official closure of the project, Germaine, a 30-year-old mother of two, gave a speech in front of journalists to all the national media. It was the first time in history that an Aka woman had talked in a press conference. She vibrantly asked for her children to have the right to go to school and for her to be considered a citizen like any other Central African.

The following day Antoine was received with a standing ovation at the National Assembly. He is one of the only three Aka to have been elected as village chief, after a long struggle. No Aka has ever held a higher administrative position.

This is the happy end of a first chapter. But the struggle of Aka Pygmies to have their rights recognized is just beginning.

Above: Aka leader. Germaine Dimanche (centre) and senior education and training adviser André Yakota talk with Matilde Ceravolo during a meeting with the Aka Human Rights Defence Group in Mbata. Photo by Guss Meijer/COOPI

Chad

The security situation in Chad deteriorated sharply, with continuing attacks by rebel groups in the east against the government of Idriss Déby. According to an IRIN report in December 2007, 90 per cent of the Chadian armed forces were tied up in the fighting in the east of the country. The apparent collapse of a 2006 agreement between a key rebel group, the United Front for Change (FUC) and the government at the end of 2007 placed further pressure on President Déby, who had already resisted a strong attempt to topple his government in April 2006.

A European Union (EU) peacekeeping force which was due to deploy by October 2007, was delayed until 2008, dogged by logistical difficulties. The UN-mandated mission is intended to protect civilians, refugees and aid workers from cross-border attacks, as the effects of Darfur conflict threaten to seriously destabilize Chad. The force will be approximately 3,700 strong – the majority of whom will be French. France, as the former colonial power, already has a strong military presence in Chad, however the UFDD rebel group in the east has already signalled its opposition to the peacekeeping force, claiming that the French are already using their military presence in Chad to support Déby. All the indications are that the EU force will deploy in a worsening security environment and will have a tough task fulfilling its mandate. There are an estimated 400,000 refugees and internally displaced people in the region.

Although the main crisis is presently in the east, Chad's inability to fashion a government inclusive of all sectors of society is a key factor in its instability. The peoples of the mainly Christian south make up approximately 45 per cent of the population but have been excluded from political power for over two decades. Under the former president Hissène Habré, who hailed from the north, an estimated 40,000 people were said to have been killed, many of them southerners (Human Rights Watch, 2005, *Chad: The Victims of Hissene Habre Still Awaiting Justice*). Habré attempted to wipe out the southern elite, and embarked on a scorched earth rural strategy in a region he viewed as secessionist. In 2006, the African Union mandated Senegal – the country where the ex-president has lived since he was ousted – to try Habré for his alleged crimes, including those relating to torture, murder of political opponents and ethnic cleansing. In 2007, the UN Committee Against Torture criticized the slow progress being made to bring Habré to justice.

The south's sense of grievance has also been intensified by the discovery of oil in the region. There is discontent at extremely high levels of corruption in the Déby regime, and the inequitable distribution of the oil wealth, particularly to the south. In August 2007, Agence-France Presse reported that Ngarlejy Yoronger, the leader of the southern opposition party, the Front des Forces d'Action pour la République (FAR), refused to sign an agreement for improved electoral organization in the run-up to the 2009 election. He denounced the proposals as being worthless while the country was in the grip of a rebellion, and called instead for an inclusive dialogue with all sections of society.

The conflict in the east of the country has several different dimensions, all overlapping. There is an internal dimension, related to the autocratic nature of Déby's regime, as well as personal and sub-tribe rivalries. This has driven members of the president's own family, and his own Zaghawa tribe to take up arms. One of the main rebel groups, the RFC, for example, is led by the president's uncle. Another important factor is ethnic tensions, which spread across borders and run back decades, if not longer. In the simplest terms, the Sudanese government accuses the Chadian authorities of offering support to the Darfur rebels – particularly those from the Zaghawa ethnic group – to fight against Khartoum. Although a minority in Chad (estimated at 1–2 per cent of the population), the Zaghawa form the political elite in the country. By contrast, in Sudan, the Zaghawa are a marginalized group, excluded from political power by the Arab elite concentrated in Khartoum. Chadian Zaghawa have provided vital support, including funds and weaponry, to their Darfur kinsmen, in their struggle against the central government.

On the other side, Déby has accused Khartoum of allowing Chadian rebels to use Darfur as an operational base. In the Chadian context, this fact has special significance – as both Déby and his predecessor Habré launched their successful coups from rear bases in Darfur. There are several rebel groups ranged against Déby. One of the most important has been the FUC – fighters hailing from the Tama ethnic group, which has had a long-standing rivalry with the Zaghawa. This group – led by Mahamet Nour Abdelkarim – almost toppled Déby in 2006. But a Libyan-brokered peace deal saw Nour appointed defence minister, and a promise to integrate FUC into the main armed forces. However, by late 2007, this deal had unravelled, with ex-FUC fighters taking up arms again and Nour seeking refuge in the Libyan embassy in N'jamena. The breakdown in the FUC agreement coincided with the collapse of another Libyan-backed peace initiative between the Chad government and four rebel groups: the UFDD, CNT, RFC and UFDD-Fondamental. This lasted just a month. By late 2007, these groups were reported to have embarked on a fresh offensive against the government, with correspondents reporting the fiercest fighting in the east for months.

The turmoil in the east has also become further complicated by the involvement of the Sudanese government-backed Janjaweed militia. Amnesty International (*Sowing the Seeds of Darfur,* June 2006) has documented the cross-border attacks from this Arab militia targeting 'African' tribes along the border. The causes of these attacks are partly criminal – theft of cattle and assets, and partly strategic. As Amnesty notes, the militia attacks communities that are left unguarded when the Chadian army is otherwise engaged with the rebels. The goal is to spread mayhem and insecurity, and thereby increase pressure on Déby. However, there are also disturbing racial overtones to the attacks, as it is 'African' tribes that are targeted. Amnesty reports victims being racially abused while being attacked, with comments from Janjaweed attackers such as 'This land is ours' – meaning it belongs to Arabs. The export of the racially motivated warfare, which is a defining feature of the Darfur conflict and which has led to accusations of genocide, is an extremely worrying dimension to the growing disorder and insecurity in the east.

Congo-Brazzaville (Republic of Congo)

One of the legacies of Congo's violent modern history is a tension between the increasingly personalized government of President Denis Sassou Nguesso and the Lari ethno-linguistic group of the Pool region, around the capital Brazzaville. This tension, which has taken an increasingly ethnic character since Congo's two civil wars after 1993, is largely modern in nature, and shows how identity boundaries can harden as a direct consequence of the struggle for political and economic power.

While the first round of violence, after the defeat of the previous single-party military ruler Sassou at the polls in 1992, was largely dominated by political and military allegiance (with much of the army loyal to Sassou), a resurgence of conflict from 1997 saw three major political figures – Sassou, head of state Pascal Lissouba and Lari figurehead Bernard Kolelas – recruit militias on consciously ethnicist grounds, often from villages away from the major centres in one of francophone Africa's most urbanized societies. The result has been the hardening of ethnic prejudices between Sassou's north-central Mbochi ethnic group, which dominates government, and the southern Lari. Matters have been complicated by the absence of effective political leadership among the Lari: an ageing Kolelas has compromised with Sassou, apparently for the sake of his immediate family, and has lost much credibility with his own previously loyal Lari followers.

In addition, recent years have seen an upswing in what some specialists refer to as 'Lari nostalgia' for the medieval/early modern Kingdom of Kongo, promoting further hostility among the Mbochi and related northern populations, themselves an overall minority. In recent years, this polarization has increasingly centred on the 'Beach affair', where approximately 350 Lari militiamen were forcibly repatriated from exile in Kinshasa and then extra-judicially executed, allegedly on orders from Sassou's presidential palace. The Beach affair has been the subject of repeated legal action in France and in Congo itself.

Within the Lari population in and around southern Brazzaville, tensions have remained high in recent months between the 'Nsiloulou' militias loyal to the neo-millenarian Pasteur Ntoumi, and 'Ninjas' still loyal to Kolelas. French and Congolese human rights campaigners are concerned that the continuing potential for conflict will be instrumentalized by Sassou as a means to further centralization of his control over the oil and infrastructure sectors.

Democratic Republic of Congo

In the year following the relatively peaceful election of Joseph Kabila as president, few of the DRC's underlying problems showed signs of being solved. In and around Kinshasa, the possibility of widespread violent social unrest remains ever-

present, despite the efforts of the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUC) to bolster security infrastructures. But the worst of the continuing Congolese crisis is in the east.

The key factor remains the ongoing crises in the Kivu provinces, Katanga and Ituri. The upswing in violence seen in North Kivu in mid-2007 was the most recent episode in the continuing struggle for resources and local control between Congolese Tutsi (known as Banyamulenge) militias and the Hutu *interahamwe* of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), as well as independent raiding groups of often indeterminate allegiance who are looking for material resources rather than any strategic or political advantage. The renegade army officer General Laurent Nkunda, who has been under an international arrest warrant for war crimes since 2005, had been maintaining what he describes as the defence of the Banyamulenge. The Nkunda uprising began in earnest in December 2006, provoking immediate population flight estimated at 370,000 people, as the conflict rapidly became a four-cornered one, between Nkunda's National Congress for the People's Defence, FDLR bands, Congolese army units and Maï-Maï militias with little allegiance but to themselves. Attempts by the Congolese army to conquer Nkunda and his force (estimated at 6,000–10,000 strong) proved futile. In September 2007, an estimated further 170,000 civilians had fled fighting. Officials from the UN mission in Congo reported locating mass graves of unidentified civilians in areas previously occupied by units of Nkunda's Bravo Brigades. By late 2007, the rebel leader was calling for peace talks – something that Kabila had previously refused to consider, demanding instead that Nkunda integrate his force into the national army.

The Banyamulenge Tutsi issue is an old one in the DRC, dating back to the colonial era, with eastern Congolese Tutsis being marginalized under the former Congolese head of state, Mobutu Sese Seko. Although Banyamulenge were closely associated with his successor, Laurent Kabila, this relationship soured rapidly in the 1999–2001 period, which ended with Kabila's assassination by one of his own Swahili-speaking guards. This resulted in yet more popular anger in the capital Kinshasa, with Banyamulenge being aggressively stereotyped as 'non-Congolese' and an effective fifth column for neighbouring Rwanda – whose ruling RPF come from the minority Tutsi ethnic group. Many Banyamulenge fled the capital at this time, fearing attack, and sought sanctuary back in the east.

The events in eastern Congo in 2007 are a continuance of the poisonous ethnic strife which led to the genocide of minority Tutsis and Hutu moderates in Rwanda in 1994. Beyond Nkunda's immediate circumstances, the long-term issue of the insecurity of the Banyamulenge minority in the DRC, and how they may best combat this, remains unresolved. The Banymulenge themselves are divided over the way to a solution. Most acknowledged Banyamulenge political thinkers are in favour of a negotiated political solution, but disapprove strongly of the lack of Banyamulenge representation at both parliament and senate level. In addition, prejudice against Banyamulenge interests remains entrenched in Kinshasa, including within the administration.

In Ituri, 2007 saw considerable progress in the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of the six militias that had emerged along ethnic lines since 1999. Coordinated by the UN and the Congolese armed forces, the initiative achieved a major success with the adhesion to the process of the last of the main militias to have held out against it, the Lendu Nationalist Integrationist Front (FNI). Many of the FNI and other demobilized fighters were expected to join the armed forces. The Ituri conflict has always had a complex ethnic aspect to it, most obviously in the stoking up of mutual hatred between Hema and Lendu from 1999 onwards, the work of local warlords as well as Rwanda's and Uganda's interference in the region. However, like other such regional conflicts in DRC in the past decade, the violence has not merely been identitarian. As elsewhere, the control of resources has been at the centre of the conflict. On 18 October 2007, the International Criminal Court formally indicted Germain Katanga, one of the key military leaders of the FNI, for crimes against humanity, among other charges, after he was handed over by the Congolese authorities.

Among minority populations suffering particularly from the continuing conflict in the east are the Congolese Batwa/Bambuti. In South Kivu, continuing attacks by Rwandan rebel forces in the countryside outside Bukavu have had a grave effect on the Batwa/Bambuti as on other communities. Pillage, torture and killings are common, and there is a particularly high incidence of rape and extreme sexual violence. In North Kivu, some Batwa/Bambuti communities have been caught in the large waves of displacement caused by the ongoing fighting between forces loyal to Nkunda, Congolese Maï-Maï and the Congolese armed forces. Further north in Ituri, the situation in areas where Bambuti live was calmer during the course of 2006–7, although some parts of the district are threatened by the presence of hardcore FRPI fighters who have refused to join the demobilization programme. Throughout the region, the chronic proverty and marginalization experienced by Batwa/Bambuti communities is exacerbated by the security situation.

Control over forest resources continued to be of critical importance to the Batwa/Bambuti. In late 2007, a leaked report from a World Bank Inspection Panel said that the bank had backed the Congolese government in planning the extension of commercial logging in the DRC without consulting with the Batwa or considering the impact on their communities or the environment. Recently, a coalition of organizations based around forest peoples groups has also been lobbying at the UN against what they regard as a deficient government response to the plight of the forest peoples. Following the government's presentation in 2006 of its state party report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), this grouping replied in January 2007, noting that forest peoples had been completely ignored in Kinshasa's submission. In its concluding observations issued in August 2007, CERD recommended that DRC take 'urgent and adequate measures' to protect the rights of the Batwa to land. It also urged that there be a moratorium on forest lands, that the ancestral lands of the Batwa be registered, and provision should be made for the forest rights of indigenous peoples in domestic legislation.

Egypt

Minorities' right to freedom of religion continued to give rise to concerns in 2007. The minority Baha'i, numbering approximately 2,000 at most, received a further setback in their attempts to be officially recognized when the Supreme Administrative Court reversed a lower court's decision earlier in the year to allow them to be officially registered for identity purposes. The result of this ruling was that Baha'is must continue to be registered as either Muslims, Jews or Christians. Refusal to do so entails the inability to obtain documentation ranging from birth certificates to other identification necessary to open bank accounts and send children to school. A government report in October 2006 argued that Baha'is must be 'identified, confronted and singled out so that they can be watched carefully, isolated and monitored in order to protect the rest of the population as well as Islam from their danger, influence and their teachings'.

Issues of religious freedom also arise in cases where individuals wish to convert to Christianity from Islam. Those who convert often do so quietly because of the harassment and intimidation from both the authorities, including the police, and religious groups. However, this approach was challenged in 2007, by the case of Mohammed Hegazy. According to reports, he undertook a court action to try to get his ID card changed to reflect his new Christian religion. His story was reported in national media, after which Mr Hegazy faced death threats and went into hiding. Mr Hegazy's case came amid a debate about apostasy, and its legitimate punishment. According to Associated Press reports, one of Egypt's most senior clerics, the Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa, issued guidance against the killing of apostates – a view which was rejected by other religious scholars in Egypt.

The minority Coptic Christians, estimated at 5–10 per cent of the overall population but concentrated more heavily in Cairo, Alexandria and the south, remained vulnerable through the year to attacks from Islamic extremists. In October 2007, two Copts were murdered at el-Kasheh, south of Cairo. Earlier in the year there were allegations of security force personnel destroying Coptic graves. There is currently internal debate among Copts over whether to support a possible presidential succession by Gamal Mubarak, regarded by some Copt leaders as their best guarantee of safety in the face of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Eritrea

The persecution of religious minorities in Eritrea remains a major concern. In its annual *International Religious Freedom* report 2007, the US State Department said that the Eritrean government's record on religious freedom had deteriorated even further. There are reportedly 1,900 prisoners held for their religious beliefs in this small African nation.

The country's population of 3.7 million is roughly half Christian and half Muslim. Since 1995, the government only officially recognizes four faiths – the Eritrean Orthodox Church (the biggest church in Eritrea with an estimated 1.7 million adherents), Islam, the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church. In May 2002, the government insisted that all unregistered groups stop operating until they had obtained official approval. According to research undertaken by the UK-based Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA) at Chatham House, the Baha'i faith, the Faith Mission Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Seventh Day Adventists did manage to register, but have not been allowed to operate publicly.

However, many evangelical churches have not been registered. According to RIIA, these have reportedly been growing rapidly in Eritrea – although exact membership figures are hard to come by – and their followers have been particularly targeted by the government. In September 2007, the BBC interviewed an Eritrean evangelical Christian who described the torture techniques which had been used on him – including being tied in a position known as 'the Helicopter' for 136 hours. Another victim reported that he was held for 12 months, forced to do manual labour and, on one occasion, 'suspended by his arms from a tree in the form of a crucifixion'.

The 'Open Doors' Christian charity reported that at least four Christians had died in 2007, following severe ill-treatment at the hands of the authorities. Jehovah's Witnesses are treated with particular harshness because their faith prohibits them from undertaking Eritrea's compulsory military service, in some cases being held without trial for up to 12 years.

In a rare success, the prominent gospel singer Helen Berhane was released in November 2006, after an international campaign led by Amnesty International. She had been held for two and a half years – most of the time in a metal shipping container, which served as a cell. In late 2007 she was granted asylum in Denmark.

Even followers of the officially recognized religions have not been immune from harassment and ill-treatment. The deposed Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Abune Antonios, has been under house arrest for over two years.

Ethiopia

Since a new constitution was established in 1995 following the overthrow of the oppressive Derg regime, the country has followed a unique system of ethnically based federalism. But the question of whether this structure actually helps minorities realize their rights, or whether it has been subverted by the present government to consolidate its hold on power, is now of urgent concern to minority rights activists.

The crackdown against opponents of the regime following the elections in 2005, the 2006 invasion of Somalia and its subsequent fall-out, as well as the 2007 heavy-handed security action in the Ogaden, have set the scene for an increasingly repressive and intolerant atmosphere.

Two major assessments of the Ethiopian government's recent record came in 2007 – one from the UN committee which monitors the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the other from the UN's Independent Expert on Minority Issues.

CERD's report – issued without the cooperation of the Ethiopian government – gave an extremely critical assessment of the country's record, noting that, among other things, it was 'alarmed' at information that military and police forces have been 'systematically targeting' certain ethnic groups, such as the Anuak and the Oromo.

It had – it said – received information about 'summary executions, rape of women and girls, arbitrary detention, torture, humiliations and destruction of property and crops of members of those communities'.

Other concerns expressed by CERD included the lack of information on minority representation in local and national government, in the judiciary and security services, and the establishment of national parks without the participation or informed consent of the indigenous peoples.

The latter point followed criticism of the transfer of the Omo National Park in south-west Ethiopia, from government to private control. Indigenous peoples' organizations – including Survival International – complained that the deal had gone through without prior consultation with the pastoralist tribes in the area, and that the government had obtained 'consent' of the communities to the boundary demarcation of the park by asking them to sign documents with a thumb-print.

In February 2007, the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, published her report on Ethiopia, following a country visit. Among her findings were that some smaller minority communities were considered to be on the verge of disappearing, due to 'factors including resettlement, displacement, conflict, assimilation, cultural dilution, environmental factors and loss of land'. She noted that, 'An unknown number of minority communities are believed to have already disappeared completely.'

While praising certain aspects of government policy – such as the re-establishment of local languages in schools and local administrations – she also found much that was of concern. She reported a perception that the political system was biased in favour of ethnic parties created by the ruling faction, rather than genuinely representative movements.

In a visit to the Gambella, where an estimated 424 people were killed by Ethiopian security forces and other groups in 2003, McDougall found many Anuak still being held in prison without trial. She also highlighted the case of the Karayu pastoralists, who had been displaced from their traditional land and water sources in Oromia because of the establishment of a national park, and industries, in the area.

Among her key recommendations were that the government take steps to depoliticize ethnicity, and promote the policy of inclusion, and that urgent steps be taken to protect the existence of some small minority groups. Moreover, she also called for an inclusive national conference to examine the federalist system.

The Independent Expert's report was roundly rejected by the Ethiopian government in its response to the Human Rights Commission, which said it was 'littered with information based on hearsay and unfounded allegations'. Meanwhile, the unfolding crisis in the southern Ogaden region left the impression that the Independent Expert's recommendations for political inclusiveness had gone unheeded.

In September 2007, a public plea by the international aid agencies, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Médicins sans Frontières, galvanized world attention on the security crackdown in the desert Ogaden region. Bordering Somalia in the south-east, the biggest group in the region is ethnic Somali.

In April 2007, a sputtering rebellion by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) flared into life again. Rebels attacked an oil installation killing 74, including some Chinese workers. Security forces responded by blockading areas suspected to be rebel strongholds, denying international aid agencies access to supply humanitarian relief.

Food prices soared, livestock prices halved. Many people were forced to flee their homes – amid witness testimony that the government was burning villages. Worryingly, the Ethiopian army was said to be targeting certain sub-clans as supporters of the ONLF, and to be acting against them indiscriminately. As a result, hundreds of thousands were left dependent on food aid. There were also reports of abuses by ONLF – including punishments for civilians who failed to provide food or shelter.

The crisis in the Ogaden is intrinsically linked in to the wider upheaval in the Horn of Africa region, the epicentre of which is Somalia. Although the existence of the ONLF precedes the emergence of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in Somalia, strategic links between the ONLF and the ICU have been reported, while the Ethiopian government's bitter foe – the government of Isaias Afewerki in Eritrea – is widely believed to be actively supporting the ONLF.

Nevertheless, the Horn of Africa Group based at the Royal Institute for International Affairs, said the government's response was disproportionate and counter-productive. Its report, *Conflict in the Ogaden and its Regional Dimensions* (September 2007) concluded: 'Ethiopian action is leading to a revival of Somali national sentiment and a sense of common destiny that cuts across the clan divide.'

Kenya

The fall-out from the late 2007 elections plunged Kenya into chaos. Amid widespread allegations of rigging, President Kibaki and his Party of National Unity claimed victory in the closely fought elections – an outcome vehemently disputed by the opposition Orange Democratic Movement. The tribal fault-lines in Kenyan society were exposed when competing political interests overlapped with

ethnic differences. President Kibaki and many of his close associates are Kikuyu, while his main rival Raila Odinga is a Luo. The Luos – who make up 14 per cent of the Kenyan population – have long seen themselves as being denied the leadership of the country. Kikuyus – who make up 20 per cent of the population – have dominated the country politically and economically since independence, and have traditionally been the target of widespread resentment on the part of the smaller tribes.

Alarmingly, post-election anger has mutated into the settling of old scores. In the Rift Valley, historic grievances against land allocations led to the mass targeting of Kikuyu farmers by the Kalenjin (around 11 per cent of the population), who regard the land in the Rift Valley as theirs. In western Kenya, the Kikuyu minority also found itself under attack; many fled, fearing for their lives. In a disturbing escalation of the violence, the Kikuyu criminal militia, *Mungiki*, struck back around the town of Naivasha in the Rift Valley, targeting Luo and tribes seen to support the opposition. By the end of January, hundreds had been killed in the violence, with tens of thousands displaced. Political leaders on both sides of the divide had no clear plan to pull Kenya back from the brink, despite high-level diplomatic efforts led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Earlier in 2007, control over Kenya's land resources was identified as one of the 'most pressing issues on the public agenda' by the UN Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Issues, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, in his February 2007 country report on Kenya. His assessment, based on a visit to Kenya undertaken at the end of the previous year, painted a bleak picture of the situation of Kenya's pastoralist, hunter-gatherer and forest tribes. Excluded from political and economic power, these peoples have seen their land seized, their resources plundered and their way of life become ever more untenable.

Since early 2007, tensions had also flared in the Mount Elgon region in western Kenya, as a long-standing dispute over land rights boiled over. After months of violence, an estimated 300 were dead, and 100,000 displaced in late 2007. The origins of the conflict lie in the displacement of the pastoralist Sabaot people from their traditional lands by the British colonial authorities, and subsequent botched attempts by the Kenyan government to resettle them.

According to the Kenya Land Alliance, the latest scheme was fraught with 'massive irregularities' and left 1,400 people 'homeless, landless, and with no means of livelihood'. Leaders of the indigenous Ogiek forest-dwelling tribe complained that their ancestral rights to live in Chepyuk forest had been ignored and called for the scheme to be nullified.

It was in this context that the Sabaot Lands Defence Force (SLDF) emerged. Although its origins, strength and precise motives remain unclear, the SLDF publicly states that it wants to reclaim lost territory, including its ancestral lands. By late 2007, it had carried out the burning of property and attacks in major towns such as Kitale, and driven tens of thousands of people from their homes. At the end of October 2007, in a series of gruesome attacks, six people were beheaded, reportedly by the SLDF. Many of the victims have been from rival Sabaot sub-clans, others were settlers from other tribes seen as 'incomers'.

In March 2007, the Ogiek issued a public plea for help, saying that 20 Ogiek had been killed in the violence and appealing to the international community for help. Humanitarian agencies say the conditions endured by the displaced are dire. Without a chance to harvest crops, displaced families face the prospect of malnutrition, and those who have sought refuge on the cooler, higher slopes of Mount Elgon are more susceptible to disease.

In August 2007, Kenya's draft National Land Policy was made public. This policy is an attempt to address the explosive issue of land ownership and land tenure, which has dogged the country since independence. As the fall-out from the election demonstrates, the colonial land policies, laws and administrative structure have given rise to entrenched corrupt practices, gross social and economic inequalities and, ultimately, conflict.

Potentially, this new draft policy – which was formulated after a wide-ranging consultative process – could redefine the relationship between the country's marginalized minorities and the state. Indeed, it includes a special section on minorities, pastoralist groups and coastal peoples. Some of the policy's provisions are: to draw up a legislative framework to secure the rights of minorities; to convert government-owned land on the coastal strip into community land; and, crucially, to recognize pastoralism as a legitimate land use and production system. The document has yet to be debated by the

Below: Tuareg man in the Sahara desert, Mali. Christien Jaspars/Panos Pictures

Kenyan parliament. In view of the post-election crisis, however, it is unclear when this will happen. Previous experience suggests that the entrenched interests of the Kenyan business and political elite may find many of the proposals unpalatable, although it is now evident that, if Kenya is to overcome its current divisions, the settlement of historic land grievances will be an essential component of any road-map to recovery.

The political chaos is also a setback for minority rights campaigners, who had hoped that progress could be made on implementing the landmark *Il Chamus* decision in the Kenyan courts. This ruling,

delivered by the Constitutional Court in late 2006, found in favour of the Il Chamus community from Lake Baringo in the Rift Valley. This pastoralist tribe had complained that, under the current electoral arrangements, it was almost impossible to elect an MP from their group.

Activists believe the court verdict could help other minorities – such as the Boni, Endorois, Nubians and Tachoni – secure better political representation. Yobo Rutin, from the Centre for Minority Rights Development, says they pressed the Electoral Commission of Kenya and the government for the redrawing of electoral boundaries and the creation of special interest seats. But both measures got nowhere in advance of the hotly contested end-of-year poll.

Despite this disappointment, the Endorois, whose ancestral home is around Lake Bogoria in the Rift Valley, continued their fight to realize their rights. MRG has been working closely with this community, who were displaced from their traditional territory when the area was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1973. Attempts to seek redress at a national level have failed, so the Endorois have taken their case to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. If successful, their case will have implications for many other minorities in similar situations across the continent.

Election season also focused attention on the Muslim minority in Kenya. Although there is no official figure, the total number of Muslims in Kenya is put at anything between 10 to 20 per cent of the population. This group has long-standing complaints about discriminatory treatment. Since 9/11 these have been aggravated by anti-terrorist activities, which have led to protests about arbitrary, unlawful detention and torture. Security sweeps in coastal cities such as Mombasa have often seemed counter-productive. The issues rose to the surface in 2007, partly because of the dislodging of the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia. The Kibaki government is widely believed to have 'rendered' suspected Islamic extremists back to Ethiopia. Amid considerable confusion, it was claimed that some of those handed over were of Kenyan nationality and therefore should have been tried under Kenyan law. In a bid to keep the Muslim vote on-side in a tight electoral race, President Kibaki appointed an official committee to investigate alleged discrimination against Kenyan Muslims by the government.

Mali/Niger

Unrest continues among the Tuareg populations of the Sahelian and Saharan north. The Tuareg – who represent approximately 5 per cent of Mali's 13.5 million population – have traditionally opposed the central government in the captital Bamako, complaining of political and economic marginalization. Frequent droughts in recent years have contributed to growing hardship among these pastoralist communities. Following a Tuareg-spearheaded revolt in 1990–96, a decade of uneasy peace has recently seen two major outbreaks of insurgency or less well-defined violence. In early 2006, a former rebel, Ibrahima Ag Bahanga, subsequently integrated into the Malian army, deserted his post accusing the government of neglecting the northern region around Kidal. This led to an Algerian-brokered agreement in July, providing for boosted development initiatives for the region. More recently, in August 2007, there was a further outbreak of violence led by men loyal to Ibrahima Ag Bahanga. They kidnapped at least two dozen army personnel near the north-eastern desert settlement of Tendjeret. Although this appears to have been a one-off series of events linked to the cross-border smuggling trade in the region, the United States has viewed northern Mali as an area vulnerable to terrorism in recent years and has conducted training exercises with Malian forces.

Across the border in Niger, there remains a state of high tension between the government and the Tuareg-led Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ), including firefights with government forces leading to several deaths. The MNJ has repeatedly declared that northern Niger is 'a war zone' and has attempted to target the region's uranium extraction industry, including an attack on installations at Imou-Araren in April and the kidnapping of a Chinese contractor in July. The MNJ has also accused the uranium sector, spearheaded by the French conglomerate Areva, of long-term neglect of the environment and of the safety and interest of local, largely Tuareg, populations. In both countries, there is resentment towards Tuaregs from sedentary and southern populations. The marginalization of the Tuaregs is likely to be aggravated by the continuing desertification of the Sahel, a process likely to continue as global warming begins to bite. In 2007 Oxfam warned that changed rainfall patterns in Niger are contributing to worsening desertification, which, for indigenous people like the Tuaregs, means massive losses in livestock and food insecurity.

Mauritania

A new president was elected in Mauritania, in a historic poll in March 2007, signalling the return to democratic rule. Up until 2005, the country had been ruled by the strong-man Maaouiya Ould Taya for quarter of a century. The new president, Sidi Ould Sheikh Abdallahi, was a former cabinet minister under Taya. However, he quickly indicated his intention to break with the past, especially over two issues: black Mauritanian refugees living in camps in Senegal and Mali, and slavery.

An estimated 70,000 black Mauritanians were driven from the country in 1989, in what ostensibly started as a border dispute about grazing rights. However, the expulsions were widely seen as a part of a racially motivated campaign against Mauritania's black citizens, based mainly in the south. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), tensions between the black southerners and the Arab and Berber northerners date back to before independence. In colonial days, the more settled lifestyles of the black minority (who make up roughly one-third of the population) allowed them to do better educationally, and to dominate the civil service. However, after independence, the Arab and Berber northerners took control, purged the southerners from positions of influence and sought to Arabize the country. Since 1989, some black Mauritanians have drifted back home, but others have languished in poor conditions in refugee camps over the border in Senegal and Mali, and were regarded as an encumbrance by these countries' governments. However, on 12 November 2007, following the election of the new government, Mauritania and Senegal signed a deal which could allow the repatriation of 12,000 refugees, administered under the auspices of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The agreement seemed to mark the end of Africa's most protracted refugee crisis – but there will also be difficulties ahead, especially where the return of land and property is concerned.

New legislation criminalizing slavery in Mauritania was swiftly passed by the new parliament. Although slavery had been banned in Mauritania for over 20 years, there had been no criminal penalties for those flouting the ban. SOS Slavery estimates that there could be as many as 600,000 slaves in Mauritania. It is a deeply engrained practice, dating back hundreds of years, to when Arab and Berber tribes launched slave raids against the African population. Those enslaved were converted to Islam and have been treated as inheritable property. While the new law has been welcomed by campaigners, it has also been pointed out that, as with previous attempts to introduce tougher punishments, much will depend on the authorities' willingness to enforce the law, if the practice is to be eradicated.

Human Development Indicators by main language groups

	Life expectancy at birth (years) 2001	Literacy rate, +15 years (%) 2001	Gross enrolment ratio, 6–24 years (%) 2001	Annual average adjusted per capita income (N$) 2003/2004
Namibia	49	84	66	10,358
Khoisan	52	47	34	3,263
Rukavango	43	87	61	4,137
Caprivian languages	43	91	60	7,728
Nama/Damara	52	87	57	6,366
Oshiwambo	48	94	71	7,218
Otjiherero	58	86	59	11,478
Setswana	67	92	65	12,793
Afrikaans	62	99	66	28,684
English	63	100	67	66,898
German	79	100	79	87,649

Source: UNDP (2007): Trends In Human Development and Poverty in Namibia

Namibia

The land rights of the San came under scrutiny in Namibia in 2007 in a highly critical report compiled by the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), based in Windhoek.

There are estimated to be about 30,000 San in Namibia, belonging to the Hai//om, Ju/hoansi and Khwe sub-groups – and, since colonial times, they have been pushed off their traditional lands without adequate compensation. The LAC pointed out that the government land policy unveiled in 1998 had prioritized the needs of the San, but thus far had failed to deliver. The Hai//om in particular complained that the 2007 centenary celebrations to mark the establishment of Namibia's premier Etosha National Park, ignored the bitter experience of their people. Now thought to number 9,000, the Hai//om had been expelled from the reserve in the 1960s. They are currently the only San community without any communal lands.

A report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), dramatically illustrated that the San people had borne the brunt of Namibia's worsening poverty and the HIV/Aids epidemic. Not only did the San (identified as Khoisan speakers in the table above), have the lowest incomes as a group, but their life expectancy has also dropped more sharply than that of any of the other groups surveyed. Namibia has one of the worst rates of HIV/Aids infection in the world. The study revealed that, in terms of income disparity, the country also ranked as one of the worst in the world. And the poverty experienced by the San community was comparable to that in the world's most deprived countries.

The deep-seated prejudice faced by the San in Namibia was highlighted by complaints over the treatment of San rape victims. A traditional leader, Michael Isung Simana, in the Omaheke region in eastern Namibia, reportedly told the *New Era* newspaper in October 2007 about the high incidence of rape of San women by members of other communities. He attributed this to 'persistent negative stereotypes, which place a lower value on the dignity of San women, than other women'. Simana also accused the police of not treating the rape of San women seriously

enough, and of failing to vigorously investigate allegations or gather adequate forensic evidence (see also *Botswana*).

Nigeria

In April 2007, Africa's most populous nation held general elections, widely denounced as both fraudulent and incompetent. Even so, the outcome was largely accepted by the electorate. The winner of the presidential race, Umaru Yar'Adua – the chosen successor of the outgoing Olusegun Obasanjo – has a tough task ahead of him, managing this religious and ethnically diverse giant, whose population includes an estimated 250 ethnic groups.

Obasanjo's tenure was scarred by inter-communal fighting at the cost of thousands of lives. The entrenched nature of the conflicts in Nigeria – as well as the inability of the authorities to provide lasting solutions – was illustrated by the resurgence of fighting between the Tiv and Kuteb communities in Benue state and Taraba states in Central Nigeria. Hundreds were reported displaced, and dozens killed. The dispute over land rights of the various communities in the area has been simmering for years, with violence peaking in 2001, when hundreds died. Many were killed by the army in reprisal attacks against the Tiv community, after Tiv militants killed 19 soldiers who had been deployed in the area to quell the fighting. In November 2007, in a highly unusual move, the army issued a formal apology to the Tiv community. Condemned by some as inadequate because it was not tied to compensation for the victims' families, it was nevertheless welcomed by others as a sign that the Nigerian army was at last taking human rights issues seriously.

When he took power, President Yar'Adua identified the crisis in the Niger Delta as one of his top priorities. In November 2007 he unveiled a 'master plan' to develop the region. According to IRIN, this involves doubling the budget of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2008. The NDDC's chairman then proclaimed that the Niger Delta would be 'Africa's most prosperous, peaceful and pleasant region by 2020'. It will be hard to match the rhetoric with the reality because of the worsening problems in the region.

The Niger Delta – a lush region of mangrove swamps, rainforest and swampland – is home to 6 million people including the Andoni, Dioubu, Etche, Ijaw, Kalibari, Nemba (Brass), Nembe, Ogoni and Okrika minority groups. It is the site of rich oil and natural gas reserves both offshore and on land. But ethnic groups have protested about the environmental degradation and about the failure of the central government and the international petroleum companies to share the oil wealth with local communities. Little money goes into schools or hospitals. Public services are in a pitiable condition.

In recent years, disaffection has given way to militancy. Kidnappings of local and international oil workers have risen steadily, with the militias even resorting to the kidnapping of children. The situation is complicated by the links that the militias are alleged to have with powerful criminal and political networks. The gangs are known to be actively engaged in oil 'bunkering' – stealing oil from pipelines and using the proceeds to buy arms. Recently, there have been concerns that the oil giants may be further aggravating the problem by paying off the militants to 'protect' their facilities. The grip of the militants on the area was illustrated in August 2007, when fighting rocked Port Harcourt – Nigeria's main oil city. There were running battles in the street after government troops tried to arrest a prominent Delta militia leader. Criminality is alleged on the side of the military too, with accusations that local military officials are involved in selling oil to Eastern Europe in exchange for weapons.

In this context, the new president appointed Goodluck Jonathan – an Ijaw – as his deputy. Jonathan has already been targeted twice for assassination. The government, meanwhile, released the detained leader of Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, and the vice-president embarked upon a series of meetings with leaders of the different communities in the Delta. The main militant group in the Niger Delta, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which claims to represent the interests of the Ijaw community, called a ceasefire which held for a few months from June. But by the end of the year the group had resumed attacks.

International Crisis Group (ICG) in May 2007 said that the failure of the electoral process has deepened the separatist sentiment in the south-east. In a year that marked the fortieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Biafran war, ICG said that, perhaps more than in any other region, the poll in the Ibo heartland was 'poorly conducted and mindlessly rigged', boosting the position of the separatist group, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), that Ibos would never 'realize their political aspirations with the Nigerian federation'. However, there was a question-mark over the MASSOB's tactics, after a 'sit-at-home-strike' failed to mobilize widespread support, showing that many Ibos did not want to publicly associate themselves with the separatist cause.

The 1960s Ibo separatist leader, the now-elderly Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, contested the 2007 presidential elections, coming sixth. He later told the BBC that the Ibo had more reason than ever to seek independence, basing his comments on the widespread electoral irregularities. Throughout 2007, there were protests from Ibo associations that Chief Ralf Uwazuruike, leader of MASSOB, remained in jail – although other separatist or rebel leaders had been released. Uwazuruike and other alleged MASSOB supporters were arrested in 2005 and charged with treason. But at the end of October 2007 Uwazuruike was released from detention. His message of independence for Biafra – however – remained the same. IRIN reported him saying: 'All we want is our Biafra. We want to secede.'

Rwanda

The Batwa community in Rwanda received a set-back in 2007. Following a long-running dispute with the government, the main Batwa organization, the Community of Indigenous People of Rwanda (CAURWA), was forced to change its name as the government refused to renew its charity licence until it had dropped the word 'indigenous' from its title.

Since the 1994 genocide, when the ruling elite of the majority Hutu group stoked up murderous hatred against minority Tutsis, ethnicity has been a difficult and sensitive area in Rwanda. The Rwandan government has prohibited identification along ethnic lines. Setting the over-riding goal as reconciliation, an official from the Ministry of Justice told IRIN in 2006 that 'ethnic divisions have only caused conflicts between the peoples of the country'.

However, for the marginalized Batwa community – historically discriminated against by both Hutus and Tutsis – recognition of its distinct identity has been extremely important. Without it, it will be extremely hard to tackle the multiple forms of discrimination this small group – estimated at 33,000 – faces, or to maintain what remains of their rich and distinctive cultural traditions. Batwa too suffered in the genocide – it is estimated that a third of their community was wiped out.

However, even before that, the Batwa had seen their ancestral forests cleared. Some were able to survive but many had become landless beggars, whose traditional forests were taken over for agriculture, commercial forestry plantations and wildlife conservation areas. When it comes to education, health and other social services, Batwa fare worse than either Hutus or Tutsis. As the NGO Forest Peoples Programme notes in a 2006 submission to the Human Rights Committee, the protection of many of the Batwa's human rights is recognized neither 'by law [n]or in fact'.

When the African Peer Review Panel looked at the situation in Rwanda, its 2005 report concluded that the Rwandan authorities appear to be adopting a policy of assimilation. This was vehemently denied by Kigali. In its 2007 report to the African Commission, Rwanda once again resisted the use of the term 'indigenous' saying 'Rwanda is not a country where native populations can be identified in the Western meaning of the term', noting instead that, as the national programme against poverty was targeted at the poorest, then communities that have been 'historically marginalized' would be the first to benefit.

Somalia

The brutal bout of warfare which followed last year's invasion by Ethiopia, and the subsequent ouster of the Islamic Courts Union, means that, for the second year in a row, Somalia tops MRG's Peoples under Threat (PUT) table. PUT is a predictive tool, forecasting the places in the world where civilian protection will be worst in 2008, and where people are most at risk of mass murder, genocide or other extreme forms of violence. This means that, however bad 2007 was, 2008 in Somalia is likely to be worse.

Already the situation is catastrophic. In November 2007, UNHCR announced that the total number of people displaced has been a 'staggering' 1 million. Human rights groups complained that all sides were responsible for indiscriminate attacks on civilians, mass arrests and looting. Although Somalia has experienced over a decade of anarchy since the fall of dictator Siad Barre, the current fighting is particularly perilous because of the internationalization of the conflict. The involvement of external actors – both regional governments, like Eritrea and Ethiopia, and the US – has meant that the ramifications of this

warfare are spreading beyond Somalia. This has potentially catastrophic implications for civilians in the region, but specifically for minorities – both inside and outside Somalia's borders. The conflict in Somalia has already been linked to a 2007 upsurge of fighting in the Ethiopian Ogaden region, with ethnic Somali civilians bearing the brunt of the violence. Sensitivities over discriminatory treatment of Muslims in Kenya have been exacerbated by allegations that the Kenyan government 'rendered' some Kenyans suspected of involvement in the Islamic Courts Union to Ethiopia, instead of trying them in their home country.

Because of the fighting, it is extremely difficult to obtain up-to-date information about the fate of Somalia's small, vulnerable minorities: at the best of times, information about these groups is difficult to come by. But if past patterns of violence are repeated, Somali minority communities will suffer greatly. According to Amnesty International, the Somali minorities comprise principally the 'African' Bantu/Jarir, who are mostly landless labourers; the Benadiri/Rer Hamar urban traders of Middle Eastern origin; and the smaller, dispersed Gaboye caste-based minorities, who are generally employed as metal-workers, leather-workers, hairdressers, herbalists and others. There are other smaller minorities, such as the Ashraf and Shikhal Muslim religious communities, Bajuni fishing people and remote hunter-gatherer groups. What these groups have in common is their vulnerability, as they fall outside Somalia's clan-based structure. They do not benefit from the protections of war-lords and militias. But they are also vulnerable to increased risk of rape, attack, abduction and having their property seized by criminals in an increased atmosphere of lawlessness. Equally, when some semblance of calm does return, they have little chance of gaining compensation for their losses, again because they fall outside the clan structure.

An Amnesty International Report in 2005 stated that the majority of over 300,000 internally displaced persons in several parts of Somalia are members of minority groups. It said: 'They subsist in mainly unregulated settlements in abject conditions, with international relief assistance reportedly often diverted and stolen by members of local clans.' The same report also noted that the international agencies involved in relief distribution were poorly informed about the special risks faced by minorities during times of insecurity.

Sudan

In Sudan in 2007 the position of minorities worsened. In a country which is home to more than 56 ethnic communities, and over 600 sub-ethnic groups, the relations between different minorities are extremely complex. However, the primary difficulty is that of governance. Successive governments in Khartoum, including the current one, have pursued a policy of disenfranchising minorities, while concentrating the economic and political power in the hands of narrow elite based in the capital. Marginalization has, in turn, fuelled conflict – historically in the south, among the peoples of mainly Christian and animist traditions, more recently in Darfur in the west and Beja in the east. And in 2007 new flashpoints emerged in Kordofan, in the heart of the country, and in the north among the Nubian and Manassir peoples.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement

The biggest body-blow to the prospect of a new, more inclusive Sudan in 2007 was the prospect of the unravelling of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). This keynote agreement, signed in 2005, brought an end to the war between the rebels of the South and the Islamic government in the North. Although not perfect, the CPA contains provisions of critical importance to minorities, including (1) a national census, which would have helped accurately determine the ethnic composition of the country, (2) national elections by 2009, which may have increased the political representation of minorities and (3) a referendum on self-determination for the South by 2011.

All of these were thrown into doubt when the former rebel movement, the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) announced it was withdrawing from the Government of National Unity (GoNU) in October 2007. It accused the government of reneging on key provisions in the CPA – including the re-deployment of troops, and the demarcation of North/South border, and status of the oil-rich territory of Abyei. Although the SPLM later rejoined the GoNU, the incident exposed the fragility of the CPA. If it does eventually collapse, then analysts predict catastrophic consequences – not only would there be the outbreak of a new, more deadly phase of the North–South war, but also the prospects of settling Darfur would recede even further.

Darfur

The conflict in Darfur is roughly said to pit 'African' farmers (the Fur, Masalit, Zaghawa and other, smaller ethnic groups) against 'Arab' nomads. This has always been an overly simplistic explanation, but in 2007 the picture in Darfur darkened even further, as allegiances started to fracture and shift.

At the start of the fighting in 2003, there were two main rebel groups. Now, there are over a dozen – some sponsored by regional governments, such as Chad, Eritrea and Libya. The fracturing of the rebels is partly a consequence of the ill-conceived Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), signed by one rebel group and the government in 2006. Struck under international pressure – in particular from the US and UK – the DPA actually intensified the fighting on the ground, as former rebel allies took up arms against each other, while the government continued its military campaign, under the guise of supporting the peace agreement.

Another key development was the splintering of unity among the Arab Janjaweed militia. In January 2007, various militia – once allies – turned on each other in an outbreak of fighting just outside Nyala in South Darfur. This led some Darfuris from Arab tribes to seek refuge in enormous aid camps for the first time, heightening tensions there immensely.

Aid workers in Darfur, have reported that these developments have hardened ethnic divisions as, in times of great uncertainty, people have sought protection from their tribal groups. Although the international peace effort was re-invigorated in 2007, there is no doubt that the task of securing a lasting deal is immeasurably more difficult now compared with two years ago. The UN Security Council finally authorized deployment of a 26,000-strong peacekeeping force – with most of the troops drawn from Africa – although how easy it will be to deploy, given Khartoum's previous history of prevarication and obstruction, remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, the intolerable situation on the ground in Darfur is marked by upsurges of unpredictable violence. In October 2007, 10 African Union troops were killed in the town of Haskanita in North Darfur – their assailants rumoured to be a splinter rebel groups. Within days of the attack, the government had responded by flattening the town, leaving only a few buildings standing, and driving out the town's inhabitants – numbering several thousand.

Kordofan, and the North and the East of Sudan

In August 2007 a Darfuri rebel group attacked the town of Wad Banda in the neighbouring province of Kordofan, killing around 40 people, most of them from the police. This crystallized fears that the Darfur war would begin to spread to other disaffected regions. As analysts noted, as in Darfur, the marginalized, neglected status of Kordofan, with high levels of unemployment, made it ripe territory for rebellion.

Similarly, in July 2007, the International Crisis Group reported the growing restiveness in the north among the Nubian and Manassir peoples over unpopular plans to build hydro-electric dams on their traditional lands. The dams would cause massive disruption of local communities, and some – particularly among the Nubians – fear that the projects have the covert aim of destroying their ancient traditions and cultures.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported from the area in 2007, saying a rebel group calling itself the Kush Liberation Front had been formed, after security forces had opened fire on a Nubian protest in the northern town of Sebu. One rebel leader reportedly identified the need to get rid of 'the Arabs' as a prerequisite to building a new Sudan.

Meanwhile the situation in the east of the country remains fragile. The Darfur uprising was followed in 2005 by a rebellion in the eastern region, when the Beja Congress joined up with a smaller Bedouin group, the Rashaida Free Lions, to form the 'Eastern Front'. The fighting there ended in October 2006, with the negotiation of a CPA-inspired power-sharing deal, but this has yet to be fully implemented. Until it is, the threat of another uprising remains

Uganda

Peace negotiations to end the long-running rebellion by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continued, while security in the north improved through 2007. The 20-year civil war has devastated the lives – and livelihoods – of the Acholi people of the north. But by September 2007, in a tangible sign of progress, the first refugee camps began to close, as families finally began to return home. In October 2007, for the first time in 20 years, two commanders of the LRA flew into Entebbe to consult on the ongoing peace talks.

At the height of the insurgency, some 1.8 million people were living in camps in the north. While the peace process holds out the prospect of ending the marginalization of the Acholi, Oxfam reported in

Michael Kuskus is a pastoralist from the Karamoja province in north-eastern Uganda, and the head of the Karamoja Agro-Pastoral Development Programme. His community is already working out ways to adapt to climate change.

'Enormous environmental changes have occurred in Karamoja in the past few years. In my childhood, I remember there were lots of forests in Karamoja, and some areas were unreachable because of the thickness of forests. People lived in scattered groups. At no time was there starvation.

'Since 1979 rain patterns have been drastically altered and food production and livestock rearing has been greatly affected as a result. Erratic and shorter rains means that the ground remains dry and nothing can grow. Cattle die.

'When cattle die the economic livelihood of people is greatly weakened. This leads to cattle rustling and conflicts arise between groups.

'Since 2000 we have experienced drought twice. Last year the whole of Karamoja province did not have food. Coping strategies for our people means having to leave our homes and search in the cities and towns for jobs just to get food to survive.

'In 1998 we started to ask people to group together to provide them with loans. A good harvest in 1998 meant loans could be used to purchase food stock that could be stored to be used later in periods of drought.

'When food is plentiful, we encourage people to sell their livestock (prices of livestock are higher when food is plentiful) to purchase food stock and to save their money. This helps them diversify their resources, which is what we need in times of drought. People need to be able to make profits so that they can sustain themselves in the future.

'Climate change in the future is going to affect Karamoja very badly. It used to be that we had rain for six months and it was dry for six months. It is now eight months of drought and only four months with rain. And even this rain is spread out and not continuous.

'This kind of rain leads to soil erosion, as the ground does not absorb enough water. This makes grass and crops impossible to grow. We are worried that in the next few years the rains will reduce even further, to only one or two months a year.

'This is going to have a huge negative impact on us and affect our lifestyle drastically. More people will move away and our communities will be splintered, traditions lost.

'How much more of this will we be able to take?'

Interview by MRG's Samia Khan

September 2007 that many Acholi communities were concerned that the peace was fragile and would quickly unravel in the absence of a signed peace deal.

The plight of the country's pastoralist peoples was highlighted by the public row over the invasion of Uganda's flagship nature reserve, the Queen Elizabeth National Park, by the Basongora cattle-herders. There were reportedly several thousand Basongora with large herds of cattle in the park. They had crossed over the border from the Democratic Republic of Congo, after being driven out of the Virunga mountain range.

However, Uganda's wildlife authorities were anxious about damage done to the park environment. The Basongora pointed out that their traditional pastures had been in the territory now protected as the Queen Elizabeth National Park, but they had been evicted upon its creation in 1954.

In September, wildlife officials once again tried to evict them. But after claims that excessive force was being used, the government eventually offered the Basongora alternative land outside the park. However this settlement has also proved problematic: there were reports of the forcible removal of small-scale farmers to make way for the Basongora.

The biggest crisis to hit Uganda in 2007 was flooding. Heavy rainfall – the worst in three decades – left large parts of the country inundated. The Karamoja region in north-eastern Uganda – home of the Karamajong pastoralists – was one of the worst-affected places. In September it was reported that the area had been totally cut off from food supplies. Michael Kuskus of the Karamoja Agro-Pastoral Development Programme complained of sharp rises in food prices and hoarding by unscrupulous traders. This region is already the poorest and most underdeveloped in the country, and, following the floods, there were fears of widespread hunger and the outbreak of epidemics.

The hardship endured by the Karamajong has intensified in recent years. Like other cattle-herders in the East African region, they have been at the sharp end of climate change. More frequent cycles of drought have led to greater competition for scarce resources; cattle-raiding has accelerated and this has been accompanied by an upsurge of violence. The ready availability of small arms in the region has led to deadly conflict, which has caused hundreds of deaths over the past few years.

In an attempt to curb the violence, the Ugandan government embarked upon a forced disarmament programme in Karamoja. But the way in which the policy has been carried out has attracted fierce criticism. In a stinging report issued in 2006, and followed up in April 2007, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented grave human rights violations carried out by the national army, the Ugandan People's Defence Forces. These included extra-judicial killings of civilians, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, the rape of a woman, and the widespread destruction of homesteads.

By November 2007, OHCHR noted that there had been a marked improvement in the security and human rights situation – following increased efforts to seek the cooperation of Karamajong communities, and better training of the military in human rights standards. But OHCHR continued to call for those who had been responsible for the abuses to be brought to account, and condemned the culture of impunity in the armed forces when extra-judicial killings and torture occur.

Western Sahara

Attempts were made to break the deadlock over Western Sahara in 2007. In June 2007, the two sides – the Moroccan government and the Algerian-based Polisario Front – held talks under the auspices of the UN in New York for the first time in ten years. This followed a UN Security Council resolution 1754 in April, which called for the two parties to hold unconditional talks to achieve 'a mutually-acceptable political solution providing for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara'. It remains unclear whether the 2007 contacts have yielded anything positive, although more discussions are scheduled for 2008. However, in December 2007 the Polisario Front held a party conference in Tifariti, which is located near a so-called 'defence wall' erected by Rabat in the 1980s to repel rebel attacks. The Polisario Front regards it a 'liberated area'. It is only the second time that the Polisario have held a conference in the buffer zone, and Morocco protested to the UN Secretary-General that the move was a violation of the 1991 UN-brokered ceasefire. The dispute may yet sour any prospects for forthcoming discussions.

The Saharawis – of mixed Berber, Arab and black African descent – have long insisted on their right to nationhood. Their struggle dates back to colonial days when they rose up against the European regional powers of Spain and France. Morocco annexed the territory in 1975 – and its attempt to impose control over Western Sahara has been marked by widespread human rights abuses against the Saharawi people, including 'disappearances' and torture. The UN mission has been overseeing a ceasefire in the region since 1991, but with Morocco refusing to allow a referendum on the self-determination issue, and the Polisario Front insisting on one, progress has been non-existent. There are roughly 165,000 Saharawis in refugee camps in Algeria. Many of them have spent over three decades there.

Zimbabwe

In 2007, the Zimbabwean crisis continued to accelerate, with grave implications for its citizens and for the region. In a September 2007 report, International Crisis Group reported 3,000 Zimbabweans per day crossing into South Africa, as well as other Southern African countries. High levels of violence continued – targets were political, economic and social. They ranged from teachers, students, street vendors and journalists to villagers trying to sell grain, human rights activists and opposition politicians.

As the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum details, human rights abuses range from torture to violations of freedom of expression, movement and association, disappearances, unlawful arrest and unlawful detention. The economy continues to be in freefall. According to the BBC in November 2007, the country's chief statistician indicated that the inflation rate was incalculable, but official reports in February 2008 put it at near 100,000 per cent.

South African-led quiet diplomacy continued to try to build fences between the main opposition MDC and the Zimbabwe government. By the end of the year this approach had not yielded significant benefits. President Mugabe continues to enjoy strong support from leaders of regional governments, unwilling to criticize the liberation-era leader, despite spreading effects of the country's implosion.

In this atmosphere of crisis, there is a strong risk that existing ethnic and racial tensions could be even more gravely inflamed – especially with presidential and parliamentary elections slated for 2008. This is reflected in the MRG's Peoples under Threat table (see pp. 161–7), where Zimbabwe is one of the fastest risers. Although, as indicated above, the Zimbabwe regime attacks a wide range of targets, two minorities are particularly at risk: the Ndebele and the Europeans. The former particularly because there has been a previous episode of mass killing, targeted at this community.

The Ndebele's heartland is the south-western territory of Matabele-land. In the years, immediately before and post-independence, divisions between the majority Shona and the minority Ndebele were evident. The main resistance movements opposing the racist regime of Ian Smith were the Ndebele's ZAPU, led by Joshua Nkomo, and the Shona's ZANU, led by Robert Mugabe. After independence, the Shona-dominated ZANU won the country's first free elections. Mugabe then moved to crush opposition among the Ndebele, embarking upon the 'Gukurahundi' pogrom. The killings, which continued from 1983 to 1987, resulted in an estimated 10,000–20,000 deaths.

Nevertheless, discrimination against the Ndebele continued. The Minorities at Risk (MAR) project notes that: 'There is massive unemployment and general social destitution in the area. Furthermore, although there are no restrictions to high office, civil servants in Matabeleland are disproportionately Shona, and do not even speak Ndebele' (see www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar). These issues have become particularly acute since the emergence of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC); Matabele-land is an opposition stronghold. MAR reports that in 2002, prior to the elections, ZANU-PF allegedly threatened the Ndebele with starvation, and a document surfaced which allegedly contained a plan to exterminate the Ndebele. In the heightened tensions in the run-up to the spring 2008 elections, similar incidents may yet occur.

The leadership of the MDC – now split – has been Shona, in the shape of veteran leader, Morgan Tsvangirai and now the breakaway leader, Arthur Mutambara. But there has always been a strong contingent of Ndebele in the senior ranks of the MDC. The 2006 split within the MDC further emphasized the opposition's ethnic dimensions, with the Ndebele led by Secretary-General Welshman Ncube generally siding with the Mutambara faction.

Historically, Europeans owned half the arable land in country, and the large commercial farms supplied 80 per cent of the national agricultural product (Minorities at Risk project, 2000). However, when the Mugabe government embarked on its forcible land seizures policy, ostensibly to redistribute it to landless black Zimbabweans, this group came severely under attack. Many fled the country – those who remain are still extremely vulnerable. The white population of Zimbabwe is vastly reduced as farmers have fled to destinations including South Africa, the UK and Australia. Of some 4,000 white farmers in the 1990s, only around 400 remained in 2007, and the government announced that their farms would be taken in August 2007. Many whites have lost everything they owned. In addition to farmers, white civil servants who worked for the independent Zimbabwean state have been abandoned by their government and left impoverished. Much of the land seized has gone to individuals connected to the Mugabe elite, rather than to the landless. ■