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Democratic Republic of Congo: Mobility and methods of transportation between Grand Kivu and Kinshasa

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Grand Kivu

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The region of Grand Kivu is located in east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and is made up of three provinces, Nord-Kivu, Sud-Kivu and Maniema (technical expert 9 Mar. 2012; Kivu Rise n.d.a). According to the website of Kivu Rise, an organization based in the United States committed to furthering the development and growth of Grand Kivu and its population (ibid. n.d.b), those provinces were formerly sub-regions of the Kivu region before it was divided into the three current provinces in 1988 (*Le Potentiel* 19 June 2006; Kivu Rise n.d.a).

2. Situation of transportation in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Several sources consulted by the Research Directorate indicated that the transportation infrastructure in DRC is in poor condition (France 8 Mar. 2012; technical expert 7 Mar. 2012; advisor 6 Mar. 2012). According to the sources consulted by the Research Directorate, there is no reliable public transport system in the DRC (U.K. 5 Mar. 2012; Canada 13 Feb. 2012; U.S. 23 Jan. 2012). Some sources also indicated that all forms of public transport in the country are unsafe (ibid.; France 8 Mar. 2012). According to the tips for travellers published by the United States (U.S.) Department of State, "[t]axis, mini-buses, and trains are in poor mechanical condition and are often filled beyond capacity" (23 Jan. 2012). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the secretary-general of Kivu Rise stated that the vehicles used for water, land and rail transportation are often old, some dating back to before the DRC's independence in 1960 (Kivu Rise 30 Mar. 2012). He also stated that trucks and other land vehicles are in poor condition because of the pitiful road conditions (*ibid.*).

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2.1 Road transportation

Sources consulted by the Research Directorate agree that the roads in the DRC are in disrepair (France 8 Mar. 2012; Canada 13 Feb. 2012; Switzerland 17 Jan. 2012). According to the tips for travellers published by France's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (ministère des Affaires étrangères et européennes), [translation] "only 15 percent of the country's road network is driveable" (France 8 Mar. 2012). Some sources indicated that the roads in the provinces surrounding

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Kinshasa are in particularly poor condition (ibid.; Canada 13 Feb. 2012)

Several sources stated that four-wheel drive (4 x 4) vehicles are required to drive on roads (U.K. 5 Mar. 2012; Canada 13 Feb. 2012; Belgium 16 Jan. 2012; France 8 Mar. 2012). According to the tips for travellers published by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom (U.K.), “[o]utside Kinshasa and other main cities, most roads are barely drivable even with a 4x4” (5 Mar. 2012).

Sources noted that some roads become impassable in the rainy season (U.K. 5 Mar. 2012; Canada 13 Feb. 2012; U.S. 23 Jan. 2012). According to the tips for travellers from the United Kingdom, the rainy season lasts from September to May (5 Mar. 2012.). However, the tips for travellers published by the Canadian government indicate that the rainy season extends from [Canada English version] “April to October in the north and November to March in the south” (13 Feb. 2012).

According to the secretary general of Kivu Rise,

In the rainy season, travel times can be tripled, quadrupled or more. A one-day trip could easily take a week. Sometimes the route becomes completely impassable for months, until the rain stops (30 Mar. 2012).

Various sources indicated that, if a person must travel by road in the country, he or she should do so by convoy and only during the day (France 8 Mar. 2012; Switzerland 17 Jan. 2012; Belgium 16 Jan. 2012).

2.1.1 Road safety

Several sources indicated that there are roads with checkpoints manned by DRC security forces and that they sometimes set up temporary roadblocks, especially at night (U.K. 5 Mar. 2012; U.S. 23 Jan. 2012). According to the tips for travellers from the United States government, “[v]ehicles are often searched for weapons and valuables, and travelers are checked for identity papers” (ibid.) According to the Canadian authorities, “travellers may also be detained and questioned by ill-disciplined security forces at certain legitimate military roadblocks throughout the country” (13 Feb. 2012). The American authorities indicated that the security forces regularly demand bribes (23 Jan. 2012). According to the tips for travellers from the government of France, [translation] “training of security forces is disparate and people should be wary of security checks, which can be abusive” (8 Mar. 2012). The American authorities stated that “[o]utlying, remote areas are less secure because of high levels of criminal activity and the lack of adequate training, supervision, and salary for security forces” (23 Jan. 2012).

The Canadian authorities noted that “roadblocks are often set up by people posing as police or military personnel in order to rob people travelling at night” and that “[t]ravellers should beware of civilians wearing police or military uniforms, or posing as police or military” (13 Feb. 2012). Some sources recommend that travellers be sure to lock vehicle doors and keep windows closed at all times when driving (U.K. 5 Mar. 2012; U.S. 23 Jan. 2012).

2.2 Rail, river and lake transportation

Several sources consulted by the Research Directorate advise against using rail transportation in the DRC because it is unsafe (France 8 Mar. 2012; UK 5 Mar. 2012; Canada 13 Feb. 2012).

According to the tips for travellers from the United Kingdom, travellers should be aware that “the boats and ferries, which serve the rivers and lakes, are poorly maintained and often overloaded. Strong currents, shifting sandbanks and poor maintenance contribute to the poor safety record of these services” (5 Mar. 2012). Likewise, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Canada stated that [Canada English

version] “[b]oats are often unsafe because of poor maintenance and overcrowding, and shipwrecks occur frequently” (Canada 13 Feb. 2012).

In reference to the Congo River, the secretary-general of Kivu Rise explained the following:

increases in water levels and seasonal drying-out periods affect navigation. Sometimes routes become completely non-navigable because the river becomes too shallow. This can also last for months. (30 Mar. 2012).

2.3 Air transportation

Air travel in the DRC is not considered to be safe (U.K. 5 Mar. 2012; Canada 13 Feb. 2012; Switzerland 12 Jan. 2012). Some sources indicated that there are frequent air travel incidents in the country that result in injury or death (U.K. 5 Mar. 2012; Canada 13 Feb. 2012; U.S. 23 Jan. 2012). In the tips for travellers from the Canadian government, [Canada English version] “[p]lanes used by national carriers can be poorly maintained and do not meet international safety standards” (13 Feb. 2012). The French authorities noted that only flights with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), and with ECHO Flight comply with international safety standards, but that they offer specialized services for transporting personnel from the United Nations and humanitarian organizations and are not accessible to the general public (8 Mar. 2012).

3. Mobility between Grand Kivu and Kinshasa

3.1 Status of transportation between Grand Kivu and Kinshasa

Sources consulted by the Research Directorate report difficulties in travelling between the Kivu region and Kinshasa (Kivu Rise 30 Mar. 2012; technical expert 7 Mar. 2012; advisor 6 Mar. 2012). Two sources noted that, unless travelling by air, various methods of transportation are often required to complete a trip (technical expert 7 Mar. 2012; advisor 6 Mar. 2012). The secretary-general of Kivu Rise stated that the road between the east and west of the country is [translation] “impassable,” and that one can only travel by air between Grand Kivu and Kinshasa (Kivu Rise 30 Mar. 2012). According to him, [translation] “road-, river- and lakeways in the three provinces of Grand Kivu are all in deplorable condition” (ibid.). He also stated that [translation] “road travel between Kivu and Kinshasa is an adventure that no one would undertake only under duress (e.g. trying to escape a war or epidemic). Otherwise, no one would do it” (Kivu Rise 30 Mar. 2012).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an advisor on climate change with the Poverty Reduction Unit of the United Nations Development Programme in Kinshasa, who has also published articles on the state of rural transportation in the DRC, stated that

[translation]

Travellers cannot reach Kinshasa from the eastern provinces (namely all regions of Kivu and Maniema) by road because interprovincial routes are impassable (ibid.).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a technical expert in nature conservation who works for the German Agency for International Development (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*, GIZ) in the DRC stated that

[translation]

land routes between Kinshasa and Grand Kivu practically do not exist because of numerous natural barriers, such as rivers that are navigable only at certain places

(7 Mar. 2012).

The advisor (6 Mar. 2012) and the technical expert (7 Mar. 2012), however, both stated that it is possible to go from Kisangani, in Western Province to Kinshasa by taking the route from Nord-Kivu and then the Congo River. Both these sources noted, however, that the river is not supervised by the authorities and that, for a while, there was no beaconing or signage, which created dangerous situations (technical expert 7 Mar. 2012; advisor 6 Mar. 2012).

According to the advisor, [translation] "today, the river is besieged with privately owned watercraft and provides no guarantee of safety" (6 Mar. 2012). The French government's tips for travellers indicated that [translation] "boat travel between Kinshasa and Kisangani is officially advised against" (8 Mar. 2012). However, the technical expert noted that traffic on the Congo River between Kinshasa and Kisangani is now [translation] "being monitored by the Public Transport and Port Company (Société commerciale de transports et des ports, SCPT), under the National Transport Authority (Office national des transports, ONATRA), which is in the process of acquiring new boats and equipment" (7 Mar. 2012).

3.2 Routes between Grand Kivu and Kinshasa

The advisor provided the following information about the route that a traveller must take to go from Bukavu, the capital of Sud-Kivu, to Goma, the capital of Nord-Kivu, to Kinshasa:

[translation]

This can be done by taking the following routes: Bukavu to Goma (by boat: price is approximately US\$50, for 3 hours), Goma to Kisangani (by road via national highway 4: fees are between US\$80 and US\$100 for two to three days, depending on whether it is the rainy season or not). Kisangani to Kinshasa (by boat along the river: fees are between US\$50 and US\$100, number of days: up to a month because merchandise is picked up along the way (advisor 6 Mar. 2012).

According to the advisor, the trip can take up to three months because of the waiting time (*ibid.*). The advisor also stated that there are risks of shipwreck, drowning and human insecurity throughout the trip (*ibid.*). He gave more details about certain pitfalls one may encounter on the journey:

[translation]

There have been reports of blocked roads in the northern region of the country (on the Kisangani-Beni route in Nord-Kivu). The river is not marked with beacons and climate changes sometimes cause numerous traffic disruptions on waterways—basically creating sand bars along the river. Insecurity on the river is very common (*ibid.*).

The advisor did not, however, explain what he meant by "insecurity." However, the secretary-general of Kivu Rise explained that the risks that travellers may face include falling sick (of malaria, for example) in an isolated area without access to medical assistance, and the presence of armed gangs, militia and thieves and of corrupt members of law enforcement (30 Mar. 2012).

The technical expert noted about the same costs and time as the advisor for the various legs of the journey (technical expert 7 Mar. 2012). However, he stated that the cost of the road travel between Goma and Kisangani would be US\$200 (*ibid.*). Moreover, the technical expert and the secretary-general of Kivu Rise both stated that the route via the Congo River would take about two weeks (*ibid.*; Kivu Rise 30 Mar. 2012). The secretary-general of Kivu Rise also noted that there are one or two boats that make the trip each month (*ibid.*).

The advisor gave his opinion as to why it would be impossible to reach Kinshasa from Bukavu by crossing through Maniema:

[translation]

this would require travelling from Bukavu to Kindu and crossing through Maniema, then going from Maniema to Kasai and taking the train to Port Ilebo and then the river to Kinshasa. Those connections no longer work. The roads have disappeared everywhere, the railroad is in severe disrepair and river travel is much riskier these days (6 Mar. 2012).

The technical expert also provided information about travelling to Maniema:

[translation]

With regard to the Kivu provinces, rail travel to Lubumbashi or Kasai was only possible through the town of Kindu, Maniema, but this is no longer possible because of a number of economic and technical problems. Air travel is the preferred method of transportation, particularly for the province of Maniema (7 Mar. 2012).

However, the secretary-general of Kivu Rise explained that, although it is [translation] "difficult," it is possible to travel to Maniema by road from Nord- and Sud-Kivu, but that "may take several days" (Kivu Rise 30 Mar. 2012). He stated that,

[translation]

from Kindu, the capital of Maniema, one must take a boat to Ubundu, in the Western Province. From Ubundu, because there are waterfalls on the river, one must continue by train to Kisangani and then take another boat to Kinshasa" (ibid.).

According to him, the river route between Kindu and Ubundu, approximately 300 kilometres, could take up to a week, and the train ride from Ubundu to Kisangani, approximately 100 kilometres, could take more than a day (ibid.).

3.3 Flights between Grand Kivu and Kinshasa

The technical expert cited the fee schedule for the African Aviation Company (Compagnie Africaine d'Aviation), which offers these flights, and stated that there are direct flights from Goma, Bukavu and Kindu to Kinshasa (technical expert 7 Mar. 2012). The average cost of a one-way ticket to Kinshasa from those cities is approximately US\$400 (ibid.). The secretary-general of Kivu Rise also stated that the cost of a one-way ticket from Goma to Kinshasa was approximately US\$400, which means that only [translation] "people who are wealthy or gainfully employed" can afford such travel (Kivu Rise 30 Mar. 2012). However, he added that air travel between Bukavu and Kinshasa is rare, and travellers must often go from Bukavu to Goma by boat and then take an airplane to Kinshasa (ibid.). According to him, travellers leaving from Kindu must also go through Goma or Kisangani, but he also stated that airfares to Kinshasa were approximately US\$ 400 (ibid.). He added that all flights in the three provinces of Grand Kivu must be made during the day, because there are no illuminated runways (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to reach a Belgian journalist who specializes in the African

Great Lakes region were unsuccessful. A researcher from the International Food Policy Research Institute who wrote about the situation of transport in the DRC and a humanitarian worker on site in the DRC were unable to provide any information within the time constraints for this Response.

Internet sites, including: &CO : the magazine for Belgian cooperation in the DRC; Action Kivu; *Afrique Expansion Magazine*; BBC; Compagnie Africaine d'Aviation; International Forum for Rural Transport and Development; Kivu Travel; Logistics Cluster; *Le Phare*; Radio France internationale; United Nations — Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Refworld, Integrated Regional Information Networks.

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