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1 October 2007

**RWA102594.FE**

Rwanda: The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, FDLR)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, FDLR) was formerly known as the Army for the Liberation of Rwanda (Armée pour la libération du Rwanda, ALIR) (US 30 Apr. 2007, Ch. 2; UK 24 Jan. 2007, Para. 3.8.2; *Jeune Afrique* 22 June 2003). The FDLR is a Hutu rebel group that conducts its operations from the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Reuters 24 Aug. 2007; US 30 Apr. 2007; GlobalSecurity.org 27 Apr. 2005). The FDLR is reportedly made up primarily of individuals responsible for the genocide who fled Rwanda in 1994 and who oppose President Paul Kagame's government (US 6 Mar. 2007; AFP 17 July. 2007; AP 28 May 2007). It includes members of the former Rwandan Armed Forces (ex-Forces armées rwandaises, ex-FAR), as well as *interahamwe* militants (AI 28 Sept. 2005, "Glossary of Acronyms"; UN 3 Aug. 2007; *The New Times* 27 Aug. 2007). According to estimates, the FDLR has several thousand members (AI 28 Sept. 2005, Sec. 1c; *Jeune Afrique* 22 June 2003; AFP 14 Aug. 2007). Led by Ignace Murwanashyaka (BBC 4 Nov. 2005; *PHW* 2007 2007, 426), the FDLR controls many parts of North Kivu (Reuters 11 Aug. 2007). Agence France-Presse (AFP) reports that the FDLR controls about 50 percent of the provinces of North and South Kivu (14 Aug. 2007).

Amnesty International (AI) and the United Nations (UN) Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) state that the FDLR has committed many human rights violations, including pillaging, rape, mass murder (AI 28 Sept. 2005, Sec. 1c; UN 3 Aug. 2007; *ibid.* 5 Sept. 2007), kidnapping, and the use of child soldiers (AI 28 Sept. 2005, Sec. 1c). More specifically, a Rwanda News Agency article reports that the FDLR pillaged 17 homes in a North Kivu village (12 Aug. 2007). An article in the Rwandan daily newspaper *The New Times* reports that the FDLR "contrive[s] to unleash terror and murder" on the Congolese people (27 Aug. 2007). The Rwandan foreign affairs minister has stated that the FDLR is still active politically and militarily in eastern DRC and that the group is largely responsible for the insecurity and instability in that region (UN 5 Sept. 2007).

The offensive launched against the FDLR by the Congolese army in 2005 was reportedly suspended in 2007 because it was difficult to distinguish the Rwandan Hutu soldiers of the FDLR from the Congolese Hutu soldiers (*Le Potentiel* 16 Aug. 2007; AFP 14 Aug. 2007). Reuters attributes the suspension to the desire to [translation] "prevent an escalation ... of ethnic tensions in eastern DRC" (11 Aug.

2007). A Rwanda News Agency article indicates that the suspension followed intervention from the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Mission des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo, MONUC), because of fears that the operations were becoming a campaign targeting all Hutus without distinction (12 Aug. 2007). However, a general with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, FARDC) refuted the report, stating that the chief of staff had not announced a suspension of operations against the FDLR, but rather had said that the combined and integrated units (*les unités brassées et intégrées*) were going to continue the war against the FDLR (Xinhua News Agency 15 Aug. 2007). An article in the daily newspaper *The New Times* indicated that the military leaders of the four Great Lakes region countries agreed that the DRC could launch further military operations against the FDLR before the end of September 2007 (28 Aug. 2007).

On 31 March 2005, the FDLR issued a statement condemning the 1994 genocide, renouncing the use of force and all offensives against Rwanda, and announcing that they would return peaceably to Rwanda (AI 28 Sept. 2005, Sec. 1c; UN 1 Apr. 2005). However, according to AI, the commanding officers of the FDLR were still refusing to return to Rwanda and were preventing their members from doing so (28 Sept. 2005, Sec. 1c; see also UN 1 Apr. 2005). Moreover, the UN Security Council issued a statement on 4 October 2005 calling on the FDLR to honour the commitments that it made on 31 March 2005. According to the Belga News Agency, 1,500 FDLR members returned to Rwanda in 2006 as part of the FDLR member repatriation program (7 June 2007). In 2003, *Jeune Afrique* indicated that the FDLR was estimated to have between 15,000 and 22,000 members; in April 2005, GlobalSecurity.org estimated that there were between 15,000 and 20,000 members (27 Apr. 2005). According to more recent sources, the FDLR has between 6,000 and 7,000 members (AFP 14 Aug. 2007) or between 8,000 and 10,000 members (UN 3 Aug. 2007; AI 28 Sept. 2005, Sec. 1c).

A number of sources also mention the Rastas, a group that reportedly has ties to the FDLR (AI 28 Sept. 2005, Sec. 1c; UN 3 Aug. 2007). This group of "bandits" has allegedly kidnapped people and then demanded a ransom from the victims' families (ibid.; AI 28 Sept. 2005, Sec. 1c). Cable News Network (CNN) and AI report that the Rastas have split from the FDLR (CNN 27 May 2007; AI 28 Sept. 2005, sect. 1c). According to IRIN, the Rastas operate in FDLR-held regions (UN 3 Aug. 2007). However, the FDLR denies any link to the Rastas (AI 28 Sept. 2005, Sec. 1c; UN 3 Aug. 2007).

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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