

Alert: We reiterate our concerns on the move of the Government of Uganda to mix both M23 rebels and Congolese refugees together in three major sites: Kampala, Rwamanja and in Mbarara up to Nakivale refugee camps

Background information

The question of the Government of Uganda allowing Congolese rebels to recruit and train Congolese refugees in Uganda for military activities in D R Congo is not new, it started since 1996. What may be new is that for the last three years we have tried to engage different offices which are primarily responsible for the protection of refugees here in Uganda. And create awareness among the Ugandan population the danger of Uganda military interventions in D R Congo which has delayed the awaited Democracy in D R Cong as it was started in 1990 during the National Conference.

The last military recruitment of Congolese refugees took place here in Uganda between 2011 and 2012 when the M23 recruited them and deployed them up to the frontline in North Kivu – D R Congo. Much as we informed offices in charge of refugees, about such activities, the response was that it cannot happen here in Uganda and as consequence no efforts were deployed to ensure the protection of refugees who were both taken by force or manipulated.

In April 2014 number of Congolese refugee leaders had a meeting with officials from the Office of the Prime Minister Department of Refugee in which they assured us that the OPM office would not allow M23 rebels to recruit refugees despite the fact that they were also made refugees here in Uganda.

Situation in D R Congo and linkage to Uganda

We all know that currently there are about 70 different armed groups in the East of D R Congo apart from the M23 who claiming fighting against the government in Kinshasa according to the **Global Conflict Tracker**. *The current public opinion does indicate that any kind of war in D R Congo will benefit more the government to argue on the necessity to postpone the general elections.* We also were informed that when the M23 was defeated in 2013 some of its fighters came to Uganda, others joined the Congolese army, others disarmed and others joined the different armed groups. With the current situation of instability in Burundi we have been informed of movement of Burundi rebels up to many parts of the East of D R Congo who move freely as they are identified as Congolese because they have the Congolese Voting Cards, reported (*Radio France International RFI*) and even information from Congolese here in Uganda does mention seeing Burundians with Congolese identities in Kampala. And yet as per

now we have received claims of the movement of some from D R Congo to Uganda claiming they are Congolese seeking asylum.

We have also observed persistence claims that number of refugees and number of asylum seekers from Burundi, Rwanda and other countries do report to Refugee Desk as Congolese and are easily given refugee status as Congolese. This has worried many Congolese who allege that number of rebels may claim to be Congolese in order to join the M23 here in Uganda. Refugees have reported to us that the Refugee Desk at Old Kampala uses only the verbal interview and the vaccination scar as proof to know if a person is a Congolese or not. Unfortunately these measures are not enough to identify those who are Congolese and those who are not, and those who will be recruited to join the M23 will be seen as Congolese because they will be having the Congolese documents.

This is not also a new, in most cases when the war elapses in Congo it is quickly attributed as a Congolese war when number of fighters are from outside D R Congo.

Our efforts to ask the OPM to employ Congolese refugees who would help them to screen the new arrivals have remained fruitless.

Around June and July this year 2015 we observed a high presence of Congolese Rwandophone from North Kivu in Uganda where they lived as Migrants and in most cases they were men. As both D R Congo and Uganda increased the price of the Visa to enter and stay in Uganda, different allegations indicate that some opted to report to the Police as asylum seekers and many were either granted the refugee status or are still waiting for the refugee status which they have used to move into different refugee camps mainly Kayaka II, Kyangwali, Rwamwanja and Nakivale which are the most vulnerable because of high numbers of Congolese refugees.

Since October 2015, we received information from Congolese business people who employ refugees about the movement of Congolese- Rwandophone especially those from North leaving the job in Kampala as they claimed going to Mbarara which is still going on up to now in the name of joining the M23. In the same month of October 2015 our colleagues from Civil Society in North Kivu/ D R C observed that there was a movement of elements of M23 from Bundibugyo/ Uganda to Beni/ D R Congo to join the so called "***Allied Democratic Force ADF***". This was made public by Radio France International which had interviews with actors of the Civil Society in North Kivu/ D R Congo.

In November 2015 we were informed about the high presence of M23 elements in different social events, places and gathering within the Congolese refugees in Uganda in Najjanankumbi, Lubaga Road, Nsambya, Kabalagala, Kansanga, Makerere and Nakivubo. Such as churches, Bars, restaurants, weddings, funerals where they used these platforms to pass through their message of recruitment of Congolese into a new rebel group in order to chase Joseph Kabila from power.

People claim that they have been promised 100\$ USA and told people that the training would take place in Mbarara and Bombo. Much as Congolese are a diversity here in Uganda we have continued being told that the Banande and Banyabwisha are the first targets into this new rebel group which is headed by the leadership of M23 present in Kampala. Sometimes also some Congolese already identified elites have been called for a meeting either at Silver Spring Bugolobi or in Mbarara, according to the information from those who have been invited to attend the meetings.

Due to this confusion many refugees who are survivors of M23 atrocities and others who do not support the idea of a war in D R Congo feel particularly not safe, and those who were previously recruited by M23 in 2012 and who do not want to join them again feel more and more insecure here in Uganda.

Areas of Concentration for M23 rebels in Uganda

The elements of M23 rebels group are present in Bombo, Nakasongola, Mbarara, Kampala, Rwamanja and Kasese.

Here in Kampala, Nakasongola and Bombo they are under the leadership of Colonel Makenga who has a residence in Bugolobi. Then Colonel Bisamaza leads Mbarara, Rwamanja and Kasese troops. Many among them have the refugee status in Uganda including the president Bertrin Bisimwa who also lives here in Kampala. In most cases they are visible at Silver Spring Bugolobi and at a Congolese Bar in Makerere.

Current activities among Congolese refugees

They are currently mobilizing Congolese here in Uganda to join them especially those who are highly profiled people in the communities. The most target tribe of Congolese are the Banade who are mobilized by those who support Mbusa Nyamwisi who is said to be one among those favorite to be the president on the new rebel group called which they will form.

Within the refugee community here in Kampala, some have been contacted especially those who were refugees here before 2012 and then joined M23 and who also came back when the M23 was defeated in D R Congo. Some sources of information indicate that meetings are often held at Silver Spring Bugolobi and those who would like to join as fighters are being directed to go to Mbarara where the training will take place from.

Here in Kampala, a gentleman known as Seco who is said to be the young brother to Laurent Nkunda is always seen in Makerere at a Congolese lady Bar and from there he convinces Congolese to join the M23.

Conclusion

We still make our position to Uganda government to ensure the protection of refugees as part of her international obligations and the best way to separate refugees from M23 rebels in key areas such as Rwamwanja, Kampala, Kyaka II, and Nakivale among others.

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