The Reintegration of ex-Combatants in Central Africa: What Are the Challenges?
The Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Central Africa: What Are the Challenges?

Accounts by 12 Men and Women from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi

Recommendations to the International Community

Brussels, October 2012
# Table of Contents

Introduction 3

The Pax Christi Programme for the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants 6

Accounts by 12 Men and Women from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi

Norbert 9

Robert 10

John 11

Joseph 12

Lambert 13

Evariste 14

Innocent 15

Jean-Jacques 16

Kambale 17

Marie-Louise 18

Justin 19

Claude 20

Conclusion 21

Recommendations to the International Community 22
For several decades, Africa’s Great Lakes region formed the backdrop to numerous political crises, civil wars, human rights violations, and a wide array of incidents of violence. The deep social and political crisis of the 1990s, generated by the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the subsequent exodus of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans – both civilians and militia – to the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) triggered the largest war between States in the history of contemporary Africa.

The conflict in the DRC has been the world’s most deadly conflict since the Second World War.¹ The violence that continues to tear the country apart has led to rapes, massacres, millions of displaced persons, and has severely aggravated the poverty and food crisis in the Great Lakes region.

At the same time, the number of actors involved, issues at stake, and mechanisms in place are constantly shifting, making demobilisation and the transition towards peace extremely difficult. Despite various initiatives that led to the official end of the war in 2002, numerous military groups are still mobilised and the fighting continues, primarily in the provinces of North and South Kivu.

¹ According to Caritas Internationalis, six million people have died to date in the conflict in DRC. http://www.caritas.org/fractivities/emergencies/SixMillionDeadInCongoWar.html
Since April 2012, the region has been facing a new wave of violence. One of the principal causes is due to the failure of the peace agreement signed between the Congolese government and the former rebel group, the CNDP (National Congress for the Defence of the People) on 23 March 2009.\textsuperscript{2} This agreement, together with the 2008 framework of resolution of the conflict,\textsuperscript{3} reiterated the need to establish a unified, disciplined and professional army in the DRC, involving the politico-military integration of armed groups from Kivu into the Congolese army. However, since the conflict erupted, it has attracted new domestic and foreign combatant groups. One of the greatest challenges to date is finding long-lasting solutions that will break the vicious cycle of violence perpetrated by the regular military and armed groups.

The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme in the DRC is perhaps the most ambitious and complex programme ever implemented in Africa. It is a national programme that aims to disarm and demobilise members of the armed militia and reintegrate them into civilian life.

For seven years the international community was mobilised around the \textit{Multi-Country Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme} (MDRP), whose main supporters were the World Bank and United Nations.

\textsuperscript{2} The National Congress for the Defence of the People is a political-military movement currently fighting against the DRC’s armed forces in Kivu.

\textsuperscript{3} The 2008 framework for the resolution of the conflict was drafted following secret negotiations between Kinshasa and Kigali and mediations by certain international agents.
The initiative, which ran until the end of June 2009, demobilised around 300,000 combatants and supported the reintegration of 232,000 ex-combatants. Despite the considerable human and financial resources involved in its deployment, the DDR process has failed to demobilise and reintegrate all ex-combatants, and was consequently unsuccessful in putting an end to the hostilities.

It is obvious that the weak point of these programmes was the low level of investment in the ‘Reintegration’ aspect of the DDR programme, namely the sustainable reintegration of those who participated in the conflict in the region. This is the case with several initiatives which concentrated on the socio-economic reintegration of former combatants, by for instance teaching them a new trade, yet ended up disregarding the psycho-social aspects of the reintegration process for both the ex-combatants and the local communities.

The failure of these ex-combatant reintegration programmes contributes significantly to the perpetuation of the violence, presenting a real threat to the consolidation of the peace process in the region.

---

One of the major successes of Pax Christi International’s Regional Consultation on “Human Security and DDR in the Great Lakes Region” (Bukavu, 2009) was the formulation of a specific plan to support community initiatives for the genuine integration of ex-combatants into their local communities.

Having solid relationships with both the local communities and local authorities, the Pax Christi Member Organisations were in the best possible position to serve as a bridge between these two groups.

The project developed by the International Secretariat of Pax Christi and Pax Christi Flanders for the reintegration of ex-combatants in Central Africa aimed to support its Member Organisations in the Great Lakes region to create “Listening Communities” and “Welcoming Communities” in five different locations: Bujumbura (Burundi), Goma and Butembo in North Kivu (DRC), and Uvira and Bukavu in South Kivu (DRC). Two training courses were held for the project moderators in Goma in December 2010 and in Uvira in March 2011. These aimed to prepare the moderators for their tasks of recruiting ex-combatants (Listening Communities) and community leaders (Welcoming Communities), effectively motivating these communities and facilitating the dialogue between the two groups.

The visits of both international coordinators and the regional coordinator strengthened the coordination work that the focal points - mainly representatives of Pax Christi Member Organisations in the region - carried out in the field.
“Listening Communities” - small discussion and support groups – provided the ex-combatants with a privileged place and occasion to tell their stories, to learn to listen to others and to find the resources necessary for social reintegration into their local community.

Given the psychological impact of war, not only on its victims but also on those actively participating in the hostilities, the ex-combatants received personalised support when necessary.

Although many ex-combatants were still tempted to return to military life, their choice to participate in a reintegration programme with no promise of financial benefits demonstrated how strongly they desired to break the circle of violence that has blighted their lives.

Unfortunately fear and mistrust have poisoned relations between ex-combatants and the local populations. To ease this strained relationship, the programme was further developed in 2011 through the introduction of “Welcoming Communities” in each town that hosted the “Listening Communities”. These “Welcoming Communities” were made up of prominent members of society (such as local authorities, traditional leaders and religious leaders) who played the crucial role of liaising between ex-combatants and any people that may have marginalised them.

An important aspect of reintroducing ex-combatants into society is the launch of revenue-generating initiatives. Some activities of an economic nature have been implemented on a small scale by members of the Listening Communities, such as collective field work, the gathering of firewood, and goods carriers at the market. The programme participants thus started organising themselves into small cooperative networks (associations), further integrating themselves into the local economy.
This booklet presents the accounts of twelve men and women who, after fighting in the Burundi and DRC conflicts, have freely joined the Pax Christi reintegration programme with the desire and determination to rebuild their lives. We are presenting these accounts in the hope that those responsible for making political decisions about the issues of reintegrating ex-combatants will find some useful advice in these pages.

Pax Christi International submits 8 recommendations to national governments, the European Union, the United Nations, and other agencies in charge of implementing the DDR programmes. These can be found at the end of this booklet.

Implementation Region for the Pax Christi Ex-Combatants Reintegration Programme

My name is Norbert. I was a student at Lubumbashi University (Katanga) when I was forcibly enlisted into the Zairian army (FAZ). I spent many years in military training and participated in numerous military campaigns, including the 1996 war with the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL). By the end I had risen to the rank of sub-lieutenant. After the AFDL war, I returned to Bukavu where I married and started a family, but life was difficult for us there. A few years later, I decided to return to the national army (the FARDC at that time) where I was in charge of training local defence units. Then I was promoted to the rank of captain.

In 2006, I finally decided to demobilise. I had believed that the promises that the National Commission for Demobilisation and Reintegration (CONADER) made about our socio-economic reintroduction would be kept and fulfilled, but in reality the commission contributed towards our unemployment and misery. When I left, I received a modest sum of money. It wasn’t much for the head of a large family. Despite my various job applications, it is difficult to find work due to discrimination and marginalisation from certain political-military authorities towards ex-combatants.

Today, at the age of 49, I am unemployed and suffering from health problems. All the same, I hope a long-term solution can be found for my family and me.

---

5 The Armed Forces of Zaire (French: Forces Armées Zaïroises) were the official army of the Republic of Zaire from 1971 to 1997.
6 The Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (French: L’Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo) was a political-military coalition led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila, supported by neighbouring countries, to overturn Mobutu’s regime in 1997.
7 The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (French: Les Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, FARDC) are the official army of the DR Congo.
8 National Commission for Demobilisation and Reintegration (French: Commission nationale de désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion, CONADER) was the executive body of the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme (PNDDMR), a Congolese government initiative financed by international backers.
I was born in Makobola in the territory of Fizi. When I was 23, I voluntarily joined an armed Mai-Mai group that I fought with for 12 years. I participated in several wars. According to the rules and beliefs of the Mai-Mai, those whose lives were saved were those who had fully respected the cult’s conditions.

As I had graduated in teaching and humanities I was able to assume high positions in the strategic organisation of the Mai-Mai movement, and I held the rank of lieutenant.

When I was demobilised, I received a bicycle and spare parts, but the bicycle is damaged because of the bad road conditions. Like other ex-combatants, I find my responsibilities as a family man a great challenge. I don’t have a fixed salary and the cost of living keeps rising. Even though primary education in the DRC is free, parents still have to pay other costs for the maintenance of the schools.

At the moment, I am a third grade teacher at Bangwe Primary School, while I am also the deacon of the Orthodox Church in Makobola parish. These two positions in society mean I am always listening to members of the community.

"Like other ex-combatants, I find my responsibilities as a family man a great challenge"

Robert
39 years old, married and father of 5 children
Fizi, South Kivu, DR Congo

9 The Mai-Mai (‘water’) are the militia that attempt to resist all foreign armed groups, or groups receiving foreign support. They are often led by warlords and traditional leaders.
I was a combatant in the ranks of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD)\(^{10}\). After being demobilised in 2004, I studied, with CONADER’s support, to be an electrician, but I was never able to work as one since no one wanted to give me work due to my ex-combatant status. That is why I turned to crime, rape and alcohol.

I remember that I suffered the greatest despair of my life at this time. I lost my trust in everyone around me. Then I met a market trader in Bukavu. She had faith in me and taught me how to regain the trust of other people. She said: “good behaviour will open the door to other people”.

I agreed to be her apprentice. Today, I carry goods in the market. I patiently pursued my new trade and I have finally extended my scope of influence throughout the market.

Now I live in Panzi, Bukavu’s former military camp. I am respected among the ex-combatants in Panzi because I know how to behave in order to live harmoniously in society.

If a crime is committed in the neighbourhood, my friends and I go looking for suspects and take them to the police.

Since then, there is less violence and the ex-combatant community finds itself ever less involved in dangerous neighbourhood situations.

I am an example of someone who really wanted to escape a life of violence and alienation from society; however, I am well aware of the challenges that those wanting to reintegrate into civilian life face. It is not easy.

\(^{10}\) Congolese Rally for Democracy (French: Le Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie, RCD) was a rebel group during the Second Congo War (1998-2003). Today, the RCD is a political party governed by the former Vice-President Azarias Ruberwa.
I was 14 years old when I was recruited to fight under the ranks of the RCD-Goma. Five years later, I was persuaded to demobilise with promises of having my education paid for so that I could pursue my studies. These promises have not been kept. I found myself at home with no trade or skills that would allow me to earn a living.

So I approached a non-governmental organisation that hired me as a security guard. I was paid a sum of $80 a month, and used the money to pursue my primary and secondary studies. Presently, I am studying for my final secondary school exams. I would like to make use of my experience in RCD-Goma and become a lawyer.

As a child soldier, I was exploited by my superiors, causing me a great deal of suffering. I remember the day my army pals took some ex-Mai-Mai combatants hostage. After teasing each other for a while, the two groups discovered that they had previously been in the same battles. We also found out that we hadn’t known at the time why we were fighting. We were ready to sacrifice our own lives for politicians’ own gains and goals we did not share. It was a good opportunity to talk about the absurdity of war.

Today I am following another path. I am seeking peace and inviting other people to join me in my quest.

I want to study law at university so I can help people claim their rights and live in justice. I am fully aware that my dreams will take time, but all the same I hope that one day they will come true.
Lambert
Married and father of 3 children
Bukavu, South Kivu, DR Congo

"I also participated in launching a small association of ex-combatants"

I live in Bukavu with my wife and three children. I was demobilised in 2006, but I clearly remember the day I was injured in the field by shellfire from the FARDC. As a result, I was the first one targeted in the demobilisation process. Now I am disabled and I use a cane to get around.

I live in the old buildings of the military camp, because my own house is run-down and has no door. Two of my children have been thrown out of school because we haven’t paid the school fees. This is a major challenge for many ex-combatants who have responsibilities as parents but no revenue-generating occupation. This is even more serious for someone like me with limited mobility.

According to CONADER, I should receive $410 dollars a month, but I only received $120. CONADER gave me a bicycle but how can I ride a bike without legs? My wife tries selling vegetables to provide for some of our needs like the childrens’ schooling, access to medical care, and food. I collect plastic water bottles to resell them at the public market. I also participated in launching a small association of ex-combatants.

I am optimistic that life will become more bearable with initiatives to award small group loans for setting up small businesses.
I was also enlisted in a Mai-Mai group to protect my land from being invaded by foreign armies. I spent ten years with the Mai-Mai, during which time I distinguished myself in battle on several occasions, ending my career with the rank of sergeant. I never hesitated to defend my village and the people who live there, including ex-combatants who are given a rough time by the regular forces. In my village of Kirambi, following my efforts to mediate between the regular police and the peaceful populations, I now receive plenty of support and am seen as an impartial leader.

Since my voluntary demobilisation in March 2006 I was able to reintegrate into society and I returned to my Protestant church. I even earned the trust of the local population and was elected village chief. My task is not a simple one, because, in view of my age, it is difficult to be accepted by everybody. I have set up a council of wise men to help guide me in the decision-making process.
I was only 12 years old when I joined the AFDL. I fought for eight years, and rose to the rank of major before being demobilised to Rumangabo. I was paid $8 a day but sometimes I received nothing.

CONADER facilitated my demobilisation via the Red Cross.

I was promised I could go back to school, which I thought was odd because I hadn’t ever been to a school at that point.

In any case, I managed to follow a mechanic’s training course for six months, but afterwards I received no follow-up and had to find another way to earn a living.

So I took up a post as a sentry in Goma. I set aside a part of my salary each month until I could take out a loan.

With my family’s help I bought a motorbike. Today I am a motorcyclist in the town of Goma. Sometimes I help out my former military friends with the little money I earn. But it is difficult when I have a family of my own to feed and a rent to pay. I hope to buy a second motorbike soon.

I really like the discussions we have in the “listening community.” The participants come from different armed groups. This setting has provided us with a place for meeting and for sharing our experiences of the past. We have realised that at the end of the day we are all brothers who were squabbling over little things. We are, after all, members of the same family. We are all Congolese.
When Laurent-Désiré Kabila came to Uvira, I enlisted in the ranks of the AFDL. I was only 10 years old at the time, but I followed a military training and rose through the ranks. Later, I left the AFDL to join the Mai-Mai. I served in the armed forces for 13 years in total.

My wife also joined the Mai-Mai — that is where I met her. Her parents had not consented to their daughter enlisting and went to ask the major for her release. Despite the release fine of two cows that they paid, their daughter was forced to stay with the Mai-Mai. My wife got out alive but was deeply scarred physically and emotionally. I decided to demobilise following an eye-disease that left me only partially-sighted.

CONADER promised me medical care and the opportunity to go to school, but to date neither of these promises has been fulfilled. The long period of military life does not make it easy to adapt to civilian life. Today, my wife and I are selling local beer so we can feed our children. When they were kicked out of school, they worked in the fields to earn money. Life is very difficult.
When I was a child, the soldiers called everyone “boy,” even the old people in my village. I thought everyone deserved respect and I detested this lack of consideration. So, I decided to fight for the dignity of my people and my country’s return to traditional values.

When I was 17, I joined the AFDL’s army, where everyone was called “Mzee” as a sign of respect. After the assassination of President Kabila in 2001, I joined the Mai-Mai movement to avenge the death of this man, whom I admired so much.

After joining the rebellion, I immediately realised that despite the noble intentions of those who had joined these groups, they faced the same problems.

The cycle of violence, including looting, rape, tribalism, massacres and so on, was fostered even among the very rebels fighting the injustices of the status quo. There were high levels of disillusionment in many of the resistance groups.

One story troubled me in particular. At the time, I held the rank of major and I commanded a battalion. One day, we tortured a prisoner to death. I am very sorry I participated in the killing of this man. My military service lasted 10 years before I was demobilised in 2006. Today I am a farmer and live with my family close to my native town of Butembo.
When the war broke out, I was 15 years old and a pupil at Maramvya Elementary School. I decided to join the CNDD movement, not just for political reasons but also because of family problems I had at the time. After my father’s death, my mother had become very strict and imposed rules that I thought too harsh. So I left to join the rebellion. In joining, I was assisted by the young students of Burundi University who had been expelled from the campus and were on their way to Kibira. I followed them, leaving the life I had behind me. I became a nursing assistant for the CNDD and, at the orders of my superiors, also took part in the fighting.

Life in the army was sometimes difficult. My superiors could be supportive but might also consider me an object of seduction. That resulted in some disputes amongst them, while I was afraid of catching AIDS. I ultimately left the army with three children, having reached the rank of adjutant.

Following my demobilisation, my family welcomed me back warmly, especially my mother who was delighted to see me again, but my neighbours did not think much of me; I still go around with a firearm.

I came back empty-handed except for the money I had received at the time of my demobilisation.

Even my old friends find it hard to trust me. I have been branded because I am a female ex-combatant.

---

12 The National Council for the Defence of Democracy–Forces for the Defence of Democracy (French: Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie–Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie, CNDD-FDD) was a rebel movement during the civil war in Burundi. Today it is a political party that won the elections in 2005.
At 14 years of age I was a pupil at the Ave Maria School in Kinama. My three brothers and I lived with my grandmother after we had been abandoned by our divorced parents. There was no one to pay our school fees, let alone buy us clothes. I went away to fight in order to earn my living and help my brothers and my grandma.

I chose Agathon Rwasa’s FNL movement\(^\text{13}\), which was active in my native province, because I wanted to stay close to my brothers. I was told I would earn a living without too much effort as rebels were allowed to loot. I performed the duties of a ranked combatant and was an adjutant, leading an armed group, and for four years my combat zone was Bujumbura Rural Province.

Poor conditions and a constant fear of getting killed: that is the life of a combatant. It is you against the world: everyone is your enemy, especially those fighting on the opposite side. It is a life fractured by extreme hostility, cruelty and inhumanity.

Today, I have returned to my grandmother’s house and I live with my brothers. I am still responsible for my family, being the breadwinner for my little brothers and paying for their schooling. I supply stone to worksites whenever the opportunity arises, and manage to earn between BIF30,000 and BIF40,000 (about €16–€22 a month). One day, I hope to train professionally as a mechanic or welder and get married.

Gradually, I will try to rebuild my life and ensure the well-being of my children. I have started up a small business selling mattresses and cushions and I work hard to earn the respect of the community. Female ex-combatants in Burundi often feel marginalised in a way that men don’t.

---

\(^{13}\) The National Forces of Liberation (French: Forces nationales de libération, FNL) is a rebel movement led by Agathon Rwasa. Today the FNL is a political opposition party whose leader is in exile.
Claude
35 years old, separated father of 4 children
Bujumbura, Burundi

“I joined the ranks of the CNDD-FDD after a popular revolt broke out in Burundi, which lasted from 1993 to 2005. At the time, my motives were praiseworthy, as I wanted to fight against oppression and the social marginalisation in my country. If I decided to fight, it was because I couldn’t sit on the fence faced with that situation.

In 2000, when the Arusha Accords were signed, I chose demobilisation. Having reached the rank of lieutenant and obtained a secondary education, I thought I was well-placed to obtain a position in the new national defence forces. Unfortunately that was not the case. I immediately understood that if I wanted to succeed in my new life, I had to create my own success. Because I like music, as soon as I received my first allowance after demobilisation, I bought a small computer and downloaded some songs and a mixer. I have earned my living selling video and music cassettes, and later, films too. I also opened a small kiosk on the corner of a very busy road in Bujumbura.

At that time, I was only wearing slippers while my friends had good shoes and clothes they had bought in shops in the capital. Everyone was making fun of me. Two years later I was able to buy a second, more powerful computer, a better mixing desk and a taxi cab.

Today, I rent a house from which I manage a small business that sells leisure products (music, films, video cassettes, and so on). My dream is to one day be a musician and DJ.”
The above accounts offer a privileged insight into the experiences of men and women who fought in the Great Lakes region of Africa. These people are also human beings who want to break the cycle of violence that poisons the region and create a new life for themselves. Theirs are not the only stories; there are currently thousands of ex-combatants in the same situation. For most of them, the international community is a distant concept; however, it plays a vital role in the success of the DDR process and subsequently in the future of the sub-region. The success, or failure, of programmes like PNDDR, reveals the importance of these initiatives in the lives of those who benefit from them. All the available evidence shows that CONADER is far short of meeting the real needs and expectations of the Congolese people. We can and we must do better.

Conclusion
Well aware of the importance of commitments made by international decision-makers, Pax Christi International shares some of the lessons learnt during this project, making the following **eight recommendations**:

### Strengthen the psycho-social dimension of the DDR process
Despite the tendency of DDR programmes to immediately push for socio-economic solutions, we have observed that ex-combatants have other essential needs. Having chosen to start off by concentrating on the psycho-social aspects, we were able to tackle this aspect of our work in-depth before moving onto other interventions. In doing so, it was possible to facilitate a significant rehabilitation and social reintegration of ex-combatants that might otherwise not have been possible. Thanks to psycho-social counselling, the ex-combatants – for a long time considered to be social outcasts – are progressively becoming fully-fledged members of society.

### Fully support social and economic reintegration in the DDR process
Most inhabitants of the region live in very precarious economic conditions. Having a dignified and stable job is not only a challenge for the demobilised population – it affects everyone’s daily lives. Initiatives focusing on ex-combatants, instead of addressing the needs of the general population, often generate resentment, even further isolating those who are supposed to be its beneficiaries.

The population of ex-combatants, however, is particularly vulnerable because of their difficulties in readjusting to civilian life, their lack of useful skills, and discrimination. There is a great need for a more comprehensive approach that takes both the psycho-social and socio-economic aspects into account in order to foster the sustainable development of entire communities. Reintegration programmes that are part of a national development plan will be much more effective.
Acquire in-depth knowledge and act with respect for the social and cultural context
The phenomenon of armed groups is not isolated; it frames within a very specific social and cultural context. If local realities are not taken into account when designing and executing DDR programmes, there is a risk of promoting interventions that are not appropriate to the context. It is not wise to directly import initiatives that have been used in a country without first carefully analysing the local situation, as this often produces actions that do not correspond to needs. Different environments require different approaches.

Integrate permanent civic education in the DDR process
Holding credible presidential, provincial, and local elections in all regions of the country remains a considerable preoccupation for the international community. It is clear that greater attention should be paid to the necessary reforms so that good governance is established in the country and corruption is eradicated. Failure to set up free and fair elections is symptomatic of a general malaise that undermines the whole of society.

Civic education has proven to be essential to foster a population of well-informed, educated and active citizens. Furthermore, civic education does not have to be limited to the election period. The feeling of being powerless and having no future can cause despair throughout society, and in particular for the more vulnerable sectors such as ex-combatants. An in-depth civic education should be part of any DDR programme, helping ex-combatants find their place in the community and become productive members of society.

Act in strict cooperation with civil society and community leaders
This project has been a great success mainly because of the involvement of civil associations and representatives of the local community. The creation of local committees, consisting of local leaders, traditional leaders, and administrative authorities has facilitated exchanges between ex-combatants and the local population. These committees, called “Welcome Communities” have anchored the process within its environment and have ensured follow up. Being actors of change in the environments where they operate, associations of civil society have a unique role to play in the reintegration of ex-combatants. Often these actors serve as a link with the local authorities and mediate any disputes that arise within the local populations. DDR programmes would do well to cooperate extensively with any local structure in the planning, implementation, assessment, and monitoring of their activities.
Inform and raise public awareness about DDR programmes
The importance of raising public awareness on issues of reintegration cannot be underestimated. All too often, the DDR programmes stop at the point of raising awareness of the ex-combatants themselves, without taking into account the need to transform the perspectives and attitudes of those who surround them; those who must welcome them and live with them. This programme used sports, radio programmes, awareness-raising campaigns, churches, conferences and other formal and informal means and media to inform the population about its activities and encourage a broader acceptance of former combatants. If we want to end the vicious circle of violent conflicts in any society, we should start by looking at the society itself. Promoting a culture of peace within society is certainly a real and lengthy process. There are no shortcuts.

Closely Support Reform of the Security Sector
State authority remains very weak in the DRC. Building a functional and well-developed state must go hand in hand with developing a security sector that is better suited to the needs of the population. This starts with training of army, police and justice personnel so that they can protect the territory and population, and tackle impunity. Emphasis for any training must be on respect of human rights. It is indisputable that numerous serious human rights violations have been committed by people who participated in armed groups, including the regular army. Once a culture of violence and impunity has been created, it is difficult to reverse it. Another priority must be the improvement of the living and working conditions of personnel in this sector in order to lower the risk of aggressive acts on the population.

Closely Follow Arms Control
Finally, it is crucial that control mechanisms are strengthened in order to put an end to the illicit trafficking of small calibre light arms between countries and within the country. The cross border movements of arms traffickers and members of armed groups undermine the population’s safety and reinforce the influence of these groups. Consequently, the international community must demand an end to any cross-border support to armed groups operating in the DRC, especially through Rwanda and Uganda, and make the consequences clear to any parties that do not withdraw their support. The international community should have a more critical attitude towards any neighbouring regimes that benefit from conflicts in the region.