

# Hope for Africa's Forgotten



A Report on the Fact-Finding Mission to Democratic  
Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Kenya

·November 30<sup>th</sup> thru December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2005·

Senator Sam Brownback and Senator Richard Durbin

## Introduction

We traveled to Congo, Rwanda and Kenya to witness first-hand some of Africa's most pressing issues: human rights, deadly-conflict, humanitarian crisis, health needs and resource conservation. The purpose of our trip was to examine the response to the conflict and crisis in Eastern Congo, gain insight on genocide response and post-genocide implications in Rwanda, and learn from locals in Kenya about the importance of international conservation efforts in conflict avoidance and resource management.

## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), formerly Zaire, has been riddled by war, rebel violence, and humanitarian crisis for several years. It is in a place that has seen death and disease of great proportions. In one of the deadliest conflicts since the end of World War II, an estimated 4 million people have lost their lives and many have fled as refugees. Statistics show that 98% of deaths were from non-combatant related problems, like hunger and disease.

This situation has been called the "forgotten tsunami" by humanitarian workers on the ground. With as many as 1,000 people dying per day, a tsunami-sized tragedy is happening every few months.

## History

After gaining independence from the Belgians in 1960, Congo confronted political instability. Following a 1965 coup, President Mobutu ruled for 32

years until his regime was ousted by Laurent Kabila. Kabila was backed by several African nations during an insurrection by neighboring Rwanda and Uganda in 1998. During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, a massive influx of refugees settled in Congo's eastern region, including members of the Interhamwe, the group associated with carrying out the genocide. Foreign and local rebel groups continue to cause instability, despite the 1999 Lusaka cease-fire agreement and the deployment of United Nations peacekeeping troops.

In 2001 Laurent Kabila was assassinated and his son was named as his successor. In 2002 the Pretoria Accord was signed, officially ending the war and establishing a transitional government. Joseph Kabila remains the President, but elections later this year will determine the future of Congo's political landscape.

## Security

MONUC, the UN's peacekeeping mission to Congo that was deployed in 1999, is currently the largest peacekeeping mission in the world and tasked with the protection of civilians.



*The population relies on the United Nations Peacekeeping force for stability and security*



*Senator Durbin talks about the United Nations role in civilian protection and security with MONUC forces*

Following one of the largest sex-abuse scandals in peacekeeping history, part of our mission was to assess MONUC's current capabilities and the challenges they face in providing security and preparing for elections, given this tarnished record.

The delegation visited Bunia, a town located in the Ituri district. We visited a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and spoke with several of the locals. Despite the dramatic decrease in the size of the IDP camp, the overarching concern is security.

One man recounted his children being hacked to death by militia forces carrying machetes in 2003 at the height of the fighting.



*Senator Brownback meets Internally Displaced Persons at the Tchomia Camp in Eastern Congo*

He was a local farmer from Bunia, but now lives in the refugee camp with 5,000 other Congolese who have not been able to return to their villages. Another woman, born in 1936, had lived in the same village her whole life until her entire family was abducted, raped or killed. She does not know their whereabouts and lives by herself in the camp.

MONUC is based in a country that is one-quarter the size of the United States. With a population of nearly 60 million people, a lack of basic infrastructure, and virtually no functioning government in remote regions, they face an enormous task of keeping the peace, providing protection from local rebels, and delivering basic humanitarian assistance. The international community has been well received in eastern Congo, despite the alleged sex-abuse scandals by some peacekeepers.

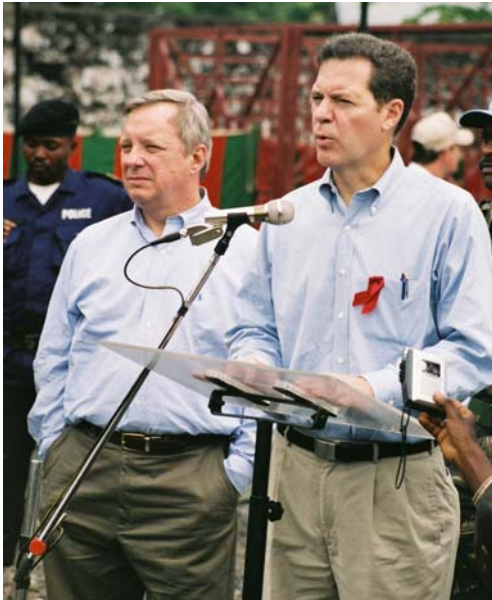


*The lone survivor of her family, this woman recounts her struggle as a refugee*

## Mortality, Health Care and Sexual Violence

Various mortality surveys estimate that as many as 1,000 people are dying per day in the Congo.

Goma, a town with natural beauty and great economic potential, has been devastated by the conflict. Basic infrastructure, education and healthcare are lacking in this part of the North Kivu province.



*Senator Brownback and Senator Durbin speak on World AIDS Day in Congo*

The delegation visited a rehabilitation center for young girls coming out of armed militias, child-prostitution and other forms of sexual violence. The center has treated hundreds of girls, only a small fraction of the hundreds of thousands who have suffered from rape or sexual violence.

We listened to one young girl's story as she held a baby on her hip. Similar to so many other young girls, she was abducted into the militias and forced to serve as a sex-slave to the commanders

until she became pregnant and was turned to the street. Other young girls are given or sold by their own families in the hopes that the village will be spared from violence.

We visited a hospital operated by Doctors on Call for Services Hospital (DOCS) in Goma, DRC. The hospital services patients with a variety of ailments, from traumatic car accident injuries, to war wounds, to children suffering from malaria. One of the major programs that DOCS treats is women suffering from obstetric fistula, a condition often times resulting from rape or prolonged child birth. Mothers under the age of 15 are at the greatest risk of the debilitating condition that results in incontinence.



*A Congolese refugee carries water to her hut. Young women are targeted and abducted to serve as sex slaves for rebel commanders*

We met with women who were awaiting surgery to repair their injuries and others who were just recovering from surgery. The widespread problem of fistula extends beyond just medical limitations: it has severe social and psychological impact on victims. Women and girls

who suffer from fistula are often shunned from their communities and have nowhere to turn. With one doctor for every 165,000 people, medical access is so rare that many of the babies die during the prolonged labor.

The program at DOCS provides both the medical attention needed to repair women's injuries as well as other immediate needs, like psychosocial services and counseling. In addition, DOCS has literacy and income generation programs for women coming through the clinic.

We spoke with 4 individuals who were victims of sexual violence in the North Kivu region. One young lady was only 15 when she was raped and impregnated by armed rebels operating in the region. She suffers from fistula and is awaiting treatment, but there are only a handful of doctors in the whole region that can perform the surgery.

Another woman, around the age of 60, was not mobile enough to flee when her village was attacked during the war. She could not recall the traumatic events because she collapsed when the men captured and raped her. A shy young woman, around the age of 20, explained that she had also been gang raped by armed men.

Finally, the interpreter in the room told us that the young girl sitting with the other women had been raped when she was just 4 years old.

These are the faces and lives of those that suffer from sexual violence, forced child marriages and other traumatic effects of war and violence in the Congo. These are the women who need medical

services and access to education in order to care for themselves and their young children. The cost of the surgery is only \$100 and the cost to train doctors to perform the surgery is less than \$10,000 for four years of medical school.

Besides the sexual violence and war-related health impacts, the high rate of malaria has had staggering effects on the population. The need for primary health care to address neglected diseases, like malaria and diarrhea, is paramount to achieving development and stability in the Congo.

An area that used to be considered the breadbasket of the region is now facing malnourishment and disease in massive proportions.



*Women of all ages have been victims of sexual violence and conflict in DRC*

### **Access to Basic Infrastructure and Humanitarian Needs**

During our meeting with Ituri District Commissioner Petronelle Vaweka, one of the real profiles of courage in the region, she emphasized the need for rebuilding the roads and bridges, and bringing electricity to the city of 600,000. A power plant had been built in the 1930's, but sits in disrepair from the years of neglect and war.

She also reiterated the need for basic healthcare, education, and investing in the youth to keep them from the streets or from joining armed rebel groups. As cities such as this one try to rebuild, individuals look to start businesses or schools. But in the city of Bunia, there is one small bank, which offers no form of micro-finance or credit lending.

Aid workers suggest that if people have drinking water, food, and security, they will begin returning to their villages. Others simply go to their villages to farm during the day, but return to the IDP camps at night, since access to water, food and security are lacking.

### **Elections**

The Congo is at a critical juncture. The recent constitutional referendum was the first independent election in over 40 years. The backing of the new constitution paves the way for upcoming elections to replace the transitional government. The apparent success of free and fair elections provides hope for a brighter future.

In a place where basic necessities are day-to-day challenges, the importance of supporting transparent and democratic

principles in elections and governance is essential to establishing long-term stability.

Given the massive task of establishing voting centers and electoral monitoring mechanisms, registering eligible voters, promoting civic awareness and improving electoral laws, there is a great need for international community to support the electoral process moving forward.

It will be a missed opportunity if we fail to address what has become one of the most under-reported crises in the world, by failing to assist in democratic elections.

### **Resources and Extractive Industries**

One of the great ironies in the Congo is disparity between the immense natural resource wealth and the poverty and mortality rates. Congo is well known for their diamonds, gold, coltan, timber, cassiterite and other resources. The Congolese people are not benefiting from the natural wealth in their midst. In fact, rebel groups operating in the eastern regions are known for funding their operations through the exploitation of the resources and mines.

Unfortunately non-existent domestic regulations and a permissive international environment allow the resources to be diverted through neighboring countries to the international marketplace.

The double-edged sword effect is felt most poignantly by the Congolese people. The rebels, whose operations are sometimes funded by resource extraction, continue to cause instability,

hunger and suffering for the people. The government, in turn, receives no benefit from the illegal trade and therefore cannot raise the revenue to develop the health system and infrastructure to improve the standards of living.

### **Policy Issues and Recommendations**

The United States should use foreign assistance, diplomatic, and multilateral pressure in the following areas:

- Security
  - Urge rapid implementation of security sector reform, disarmament and reintegration of indigenous combatants, and the disarmament and repatriation of foreign forces.
  - Engage with governments working to promote peace and security in the DRC and hold accountable entities or countries working to undermine the peace process and destabilize the country.
- Sexual Violence
  - Support programs to protect IDPs from violence and sexual abuse and other human rights abuses, address basic needs of vulnerable populations.
  - Call on the UN to appoint an independent inquiry commission to investigate the peacekeeping sex abuse scandal.
- Access to Infrastructure and Humanitarian needs
  - Emphasize a commodity-based approach to assistance in areas like the DRC where food, water, medicine, and infrastructure are priorities. Such an approach would be instrumental to the promotion of development and the curbing of cyclical humanitarian crises.
- Elections
  - Work to promote electoral law and ensure fair and democratic elections take place, as well as promote civil society building activities that support transparent governance, anti-corruption agendas, the respect for democratic principles and human rights, and a commitment to peace and stability in the region and with their neighbors.
- Resources and Extractive Industries
  - Push for tighter regulations, transparency, and accountability of the extractive industries and;
  - Promote appropriate use of forests that benefit the rural populations and protect environmental interests.



## RWANDA

Rwanda is a country that has seen great tragedy, yet great reconciliation and progress. The development of roads and infrastructure provides a stark contrast to war-torn Congo and is a reminder of the resilience and hope of the Rwandan people.

It is the second-most densely populated country on earth, providing a unique set of issues for agricultural sustainability and development.

### **Orphans**

We visited the "Orphanage of Noel" in Nyundo run by the Catholic Church with support from Catholic Relief Services. The orphanage was founded over 50 years ago when a bishop began caring for 50 children. During the 1994 genocide, the orphanage opened its doors to hundreds of children who had been orphaned or separated from their parents. Caretakers have been able to reunify over 800 children with their families since that time.

We visited with newborns and toddlers orphaned by common and preventable diseases like malaria. We met mentally and physically handicapped children. We saw others whose parents had died

of AIDS, or whose mothers had died during childbirth.

Today the Nyundo orphanage cares for nearly 600 children, with the support of USAID and US food aid programs. With continued support, particularly for the food aid programs, this orphanage will see great success.

Much more support for prevention of an orphan crisis combined with increased care and adoption for orphaned children is needed across Africa. Without greater support for orphanages, caretakers, foster families and villages who adopt these children, we will see a growing number of street children who could be recruited into militias or prostitute themselves on the streets.



*The Orphanage of Noel is home to nearly 600 children who have lost their parents to genocide, disease, and childbirth complications*

### **Genocide**

It was clear that the anguish of the genocide in Rwanda is still raw for most of the country.

We met with President Kagame who discussed the impact of genocide on his nation. He spoke about the international community's response to the genocide and the need for more effective and targeted international aid to Africa.





*Senators Brownback and Durbin meet with Rwandan President Paul Kagame*

One of the major tasks facing Rwanda is bringing justice to those responsible for the genocide. It would take nearly 300 years to hold trials for all of those responsible for the 1994 genocide in the current justice system. For this reason, Rwanda is turning towards a more traditional peace and reconciliation process known as *Gacaca* trials. Literally meaning “on the grass”, local villages gather in a public setting to hear confessions, trials and sentencing of perpetrators in their communities. Though not perfect, this process provides justice *and* reconciliation that the formal legal system could not otherwise provide.

We met with the national implementer for the *Gacaca* process who explained the details of the justice system and some of the success stories. Beyond the massive killings and brutality during Rwanda’s genocide, there was substantial looting of homes and businesses. Survivors recount walking down the street and seeing their front door on someone else’s home. One survivor told about returning to her village and seeing a neighbor wearing her mother’s dress. Returning stolen properties and finding reconciliation for the petty crimes of the genocide also remains an enormous task.

Rwanda is an organized, clean and structured nation with great potential. However in talking to genocide survivors, it is evident that the healing process continues more than a decade later.



*The Senators lay a wreath at the Kigali Genocide Memorial in the capital of Rwanda*

We visited the Kigali Genocide Memorial, a touching tribute to the nearly 1 million lives lost in the genocide. It was a difficult reminder of the world’s inaction during Rwanda’s darkest days. Our hope is that through memorials like these, we will continue to be reminded of the need to prevent and to end genocide, including the current and ongoing genocide in Darfur, Sudan.



*The Rwandan Genocide Memorial Museum provides a stark reminder of the importance of combating genocide and upholding human rights*

## Policy Issues and Recommendations

- Orphans
  - The US should work with African nations to address the massive issue of orphaned and street children. Through support for the expansion of international adoption in Africa, support for orphanages, assistance for extended family members and other community caregivers, village-sponsor programs, and US-based missions and church programs, our nation has great resources to help Africa's children. A coordinated and jointly-run public-private donor system for orphaned children should be explored.
  - The US should provide more targeted goods and products to fight the primary causes of death in Africa, such as AIDS, malaria, TB, as well as many neglected diseases, and complications from child-birth.
  - The US should support community-based programs to address issues such as maternal mortality.



*Children at the Orphanage of Noel*

- Genocide
  - The US should work to develop a comprehensive policy on US assistance for genocide prevention and response, and;
  - Should work with the international community to develop an integrated early warning system to detect genocide, acts of genocide and crimes against humanity.



*A photo display at Kigali's genocide memorial*

## KENYA

The purpose of our visit to the Masai Mara region of Kenya was to investigate the importance of conservation efforts in wildlife protection, conflict avoidance, resource management and human rights.

### Conservation

Our delegation examined two areas of the Masai Mara ecosystem. One area is privately managed by the Transmara Conservancy, a company hired by the Transmara County Council.

The other side of the Mara, Koiyaki-Lemek, is under the collective management of Masai ranchers.

Unfortunately, outside of the conservancy site, access roads remain poor, and livestock grazing and unchecked local ranching has depleted the number of wild animals.



*An abundance of wild animals coexist in the Masai Mara region of Kenya.*

We witnessed the end of the annual wildebeest migration from the Mara to the Serengeti in Tanzania. All a part of the same eco-system, the importance of preserving such migration routes remains the key to survival for many of these animals.

Human impact and encroachment in some of the areas is a major concern expressed by conservationists. Poachers capture and sell animals for thousands of dollars.



### Corruption

Brian Heath, director of the Transmara Conservancy, discussed the rampant problem of corruption in the game park industry. He estimates that only 10% of revenues from park fees reach the Transmara Conservancy.

Just prior to our arrival in Kenya, President Kibaki, in a political move to shore up votes for a constitutional referendum, downgraded the status of Amboseli National Park to a nature reserve controlled by a local county council. Without going through proper consultation or legal channels, the move has been seen by international conservationists as a dangerous maneuver that could have adverse effects on other conservation areas. For example, if the Transmara County Council decided to assert greater control over the management of the Masai Mara, such a change could lead to many of the problems that are seen in the Koiyaki-Lemek side of the Mara. Community disputes over land rights, uneven access to tourist dollars, little attention to conservation efforts, and higher rates of poaching are present in Koiyaki-Lemek.

## Local Involvement

We were able to visit a very basic local school that was established in part due to the interest of international conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to educate the Masai community about the benefits of wildlife and conservation.

Greater community understanding about the importance of management conservation could lead to successful efforts and reduced corruption, which will in turn benefit Kenya's tourism industry as well as safeguard national resources.

Educating locals about the importance of preserving eco-systems like the Mara is crucial to long term economic stability, good-governance, and conflict avoidance.

## Policy Issues and Recommendations

- Conservation
  - US leadership in international conservation and preservation efforts is an important aspect of development and security. The US should continue to prioritize conservation efforts and use diplomatic tools to ensure foreign governments are committed to resource management and wildlife protection.
  - The US should develop a ranking system for countries world-wide based on their efforts to promote and protect conservation efforts, to

end the illicit trade and trafficking of endangered species, and to address corruption.

- In addition to offering environmental guidelines, the Millennium Challenge Account should explore how best to include environmental protection as an indicator for eligibility.



*A local Masai woman wears a traditional beaded wedding necklace. Many women sell their handicrafts to visiting tourists.*

## Conclusion

The faces of the men, women and children we encountered had stories of sorrow, triumph and hope. It is stories like these that reinforce the need to fight AIDS, malaria and neglected diseases. Stories like these that remind us of our promise, “never again.” Stories like these that reinforce the need to assist vulnerable women and children. And stories like these that reinforce the need for greater compassion and assistance to help the people of Africa.



### *Acknowledgements*

*We wish to send a sincere message of appreciation to our embassy personnel in each country for their assistance during our visits, especially Ambassador Meece, Ambassador Arietti and Ambassador Bellamy.*

*We are grateful to UN Ambassador William Swing and the entire MONUC staff and personnel who accompanied our delegation in Eastern Congo.*

*Special thanks go to His Excellency Paul Kagame for his hospitality in Rwanda.*

*Gratitude and admiration to all of the non-governmental organizations who met with us, and dedicate their lives to the people of Africa.*

*Thank you to Major Timothy Jacobsen of the U.S. Army Senate Liaison Office for logistics and coordination*

*Finally, thank you to each of the villages and communities that welcomed the delegation. Your hospitality and graciousness continues to amaze us, and your openness and warmth will not be forgotten.*