PERSPECTIVES ON CURRENT CONFLICTS IN AFRICA: VERIFYING THE SPECIAL NATURE OF TODAY'S AFRICAN CONFLICTS

(Democratic Republic of Congo and Conflicts in Central Africa)

by

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

At the outset, let me express my sincere gratitude to the President and Staff of Japan Institute for International Affairs inviting me to this Symposium on Africa and for the hospitality accorded to me since my arrival in Tokyo. The topic of my short presentation is the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as an illustration of an African conflict which threatens the peace and security of the Central-African region and perhaps the entire African Continent. We may begin with a brief background to the conflict in DRC. In October 1996, a rebellion against Zairian National Army (FAZ) which was under the leadership of late President Mobutu Sese Seko, began in the Kivu province, Eastern region of Congo. The rebellion was by the opposition forces which were regrouped into an alliance called *Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL)*. The initial alliance included the following parties: the *Parti de la Revolution Popular (PRP)* of late President Laurent-Desire Kabila; the *Conseil de la Resistance pour la Democratie (CRD)* headed by Kisasse Ngandu; the *Alliance Democratique des Peuples (ADP)* of Deogratias Bugera; and the *Movement Revolutionaire pour la Liberation du Zaire (MRLZ)* led by Masasu Ningaba. Laurent-Desire Kabila was nominated to the leadership of AFDL due to his long-standing opposition to Mobutu's regime. This alliance to topple the government of Mobutu was supported with military assistance from neighbouring states, namely Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and Angola. So that, right from the start, neighbouring countries injected themselves into the conflict in DRC.

For Rwanda, the struggle against Mobutu's regime is founded on its security concerns. The Tutsi-dominated government in Kigali armed the Zairian opposition, mainly Congolese-Tutsi to dismantle the refugee camps in Eastern Congo of its enemies, the Hutu extremists, who fled there when the RPF forces took control in Kigali. The Ugandans claimed that, based on security reasons, their support for the alliance ADFL of Congo was to deter or deny the Ugandan rebels of *Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)*, the *Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)* and *West Nile Front (WBNF)* from the use of Zaire as rear entry posts for destabilisation of Uganda. Burundi expressed similar

national security concerns for its involvement in DRC as the Tutsi-led government alleged that the Hutu rebels of the *National Council for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD)* and the *Forces for the Defense of Democracy (FDD)* had been using the Congolese territory to launch attacks against the regime. On its part, Angola explained its military supports to ADFL based on preoccupations about the UNITA's use of the Congolese borders for waging war in Angolan territory.

In May 1997, the totality of these considerable military support and other diplomatic assistance from elsewhere culminated in the military victory that brought to power late Laurent-Desire Kabila, who proclaimed himself President and renamed the country Democratic Republic of Congo. Unfortunately, late President Kabila's rise to power in Kinshasa failed to meet the expectations of the people, his principal political allies and the international community. The problems of creating a new ruling team different from that which put the government in power; lack of democratic reforms and transparent management of resources and of human rights reforms as well as practices of favouritism and ethnic based politics led to important divisions within the ADFL, thereby causing disappointment and disaffection.

2. NATURE OF THE CONFLICT IN DRC

a. Regional Security Concerns

The brief background to the situation in DRC also shows one aspect of the nature of the conflict – i.e. security concerns of neighbouring countries; hence establishing the regional dimension of the problems and prospects in that country.

b. Struggle for Power and Control of the State

In August 1998, barely 14-months in power, late President Kabila was challenged by a faction of ADFL which created a new party labelled *Rally for Congolese Democracy (RDC)* led by Ernest Wamba dia Wamba. With the help of forces from previous allied states including Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi that regrouped with the opposition, the opposition movement – RCD – started an uprising in Eastern region of Congo. Concurrently, the *Movement pour la Liberation du Congo (MLC)* led by Bemba and assisted by Uganda,

began wrecking havoc in the Northern region. Again, the rebellion that began in the Kivu province deteriorated rapidly into a ravaging civil war, referred to as "Africa's first world war", and forced Kabila to build a new coalition to help drive away rebel forces from their advance positions near Kinshasa. To avert being toppled, Kabila accepted these foreign troops from Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia among others, and this enabled his government to mount massive military operations including air and ground assaults on the rebels which helped to contain the war to the Eastern and Northern Congo.

c. The Struggle for Control of Natural Resources and Others (namely, diamond, gold and coffee concessions)

This probably led to the confrontations between Uganda and Rwanda forces stationed in Kisangani – deep inside a third country (DRC) Moreover,. Zimbabwe's involvement in the war in DRC is alleged to be motivated by this consideration.

d. Massive Displacement of Populations and Humanitarian Disaster

In any case, the ongoing hostilities have spread halfway across the country and according to the report of International Rescue Committee of May 2000, an estimated "1.7 million deaths or more have occurred over the past 22 months as a result of the fighting in Eastern DRC". Moreover, about 2 million refugees and IDPs are affected while grave humanitarian tragedies are inflicted on the populace with the worsened economy.

3. PEACE INITIATIVES FOR THE DRC

The gravity of the war in DRC has prompted intensive negotiations for a peaceful end to the conflict involving the United Nations, the OAU, SADC and the international community in an effort to obtain ceasefire accords from the warring parties. As a result of these efforts and following protracted rounds of talks, a ceasefire agreement was brokered by SADC and the OAU in Lusaka on 10 July 1999. The Lusaka Ceasefire Accords stipulated the following:

- The immediate cessations of hostilities to be followed three days later by the release of all prisoners-of-war;
- The establishment of Joint Military Commission (JMC) composed of the belligerent parties to investigate ceasefire violations;
- To work out modalities for disarmament of armed groups in days 30-120 after the ceasefire;
- Orderly withdrawal of foreign troops within 180 days;
- The OAU was mandated to assist in organising and supervising the Congolese National Dialogue intended to solve the conflict;
- The request for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force with the task to implement the DDR of ex-combatants, to provide humanitarian aid and assistance to refugees and IDPs;
- Re-establishment of DRC State administration in 90-270 days.

The Lusaka Agreement was signed by all parties in the conflicts, except one of the main rebel groups, RCD, which was locked in a factional dispute and pledged to continue fighting. Right from the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement, the implementation was faced with difficulties of logistics as the Agreement failed to address who should take the leadership in overseeing its implementation. One of the major components of Lusaka Agreement, the establishment of JMC as a decision-making body composed of two representatives from each signatory under the chairmanship of a neutral OAU-appointed chairman, was an interim peacekeeping operation plagued with several obstacles. The JMC was to be answerable to the Political Committee which consists of the Signatories' Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence. The daunting task of JMC to "track, disarm, and document all armed groups in DRC" was obstructed, as the Political Committee suspended the 8 April Kampala Disengagement Plan which highlighted the position of each nation's forward line of forces and their re-deployment. Moreover, lack of funds, inability of it Chairman to be on the ground and running, and constant ceasefire violations rendered the body ineffective.

Parallel to the issues of ceasefire and disengagement of forces, the Lusaka Agreement made provisions for a framework for promoting Inter-Congolese Dialogue. This

National Dialogue was to function as the assembly of all segments of the society in DRC including the government, the rebels, the political opposition and members of the civil society enjoying equal status during the negotiations. The OAU was mandated to appoint a Facilitator chosen by all parties. After five months of searching for a suitable person acceptable to all parties, former President Masire of Botswana was approved as the Facilitator. Unfortunately, the Facilitator could not perform the duties as a series of impediments blocked his initiatives. The Government in Kinshasa rejected the facilitating efforts alleging that the Facilitator was not impartial and that the national dialogue would not commence under occupation of DRC foreign forces in Eastern Congo. The lack of funds for the Facilitation Office at its initial stage also made it difficult for the Facilitator to proceed effectively. Ironically, prior to the death of President Laurent Kabila and with the facilitation process stalemated, there was a significant increase in financial and personnel support from some Western donor countries.

4. ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Although the United Nations did not participate in negotiating it, nonetheless the Lusaka Agreement assigned two principal roles for the world body. On one hand, the UN was to liase with the JMC in monitoring and observing the cessation of hostilities, supervising the weapon's collection, disengagement and withdrawal of foreign troops and administering humanitarian aid and protection of civilians. On the other hand, the world body was expected to help in disarming rebel forces that are not signatories to the Agreement.

In line with the primary responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security, it adopted Resolution S/1258/1999 of 6 August 1999 that authorised the establishment of UN mission in DRC, (MONUC) with the initial deployment of UN Military Liaison Officer to each of the capitals of Lusaka's signatories. Furthermore, on 1 November 1999, the report of the Secretary General on the situation in DRC recommended to the Security Council that MONUC phase II of additional Military Observers be deployed to that country.

The Security Council, under the Presidency of United States, initiated an open debate on the situation in DRC in January 2000 to re-energise Lusaka Accords, with the participation of African sub-regional leaders including late President Kabila and the warring parties. Later, the Security Council adopted resolution 1291 of 24 February 2000 endorsing the deployment of 5037 Military Personnel and 500 Military Observers. However, several restrictions placed on the movement of MONUC personnel by the government in Kinshasa, the continued violations of ceasefire agreements by the warring parties, the general lack of security in DRC and the lack of progress in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue have prevented the deployment of phase II of MONUC.

5. RECENT EVENTS IN DRC

The death of President Laurent Kabila, in January 2001, in circumstances which are yet to be fully explained and the succession to the Presidency by his son, Joseph Kabila, may present a window of opportunity to move the peace process forward. The new Congolese leader has already visited Paris, Washington, New York (UN) and Brussels. His statements there and upon assuming power have largely been positive. It also appears that some of the allies of DRC/Zimbabwe and Namibia maybe seeking decent ways of withdrawal of their forces. Moreover, in the last three weeks or so, there were almost no ceasefire violations. Is this a genuine trend or "wait and see" attitude on the part of the parties? Ceasefire agreements that endure would ease the delivery of the much-needed humanitarian assistance in the country. Are the rebel forces ready to accept President Kabila as leader of the country or only parts of it which are under government control? What would be the practical results of the face to face meeting between President Kagame (Rwanda) and President Kabila which took place in Washington?

While it is true that the Security Council, in its Resolution 1304 of 16 June 2000 demanded the withdrawal of Ugandan and Rwandan forces (who were fighting each other in a third country) from the city of Kisangani and, in line with the timetable agreed to in Kampala (Uganda) on 8 April 2000, from the rest of DRC, the Lusaka Agreement called for early withdrawal of all foreign forces from the country. Would President Joseph Kabila continue the policy of his father which drew a distinction

between "invited" foreign forces (i.e. Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia) which are welcomed to stay, and the "forces of occupation" (Rwanda and Uganda) which are to leave DRC? Would the Security Council take strong actions to implement the findings that may be contained in the final report of its Expert Panel established to investigate illegal exploitation of natural and other resources of the DRC?

6. CONCLUSION

It has been shown that the conflict in the DRC is complex and multi-dimensional. However, the faithful implementation of the two pillars of the Lusaka Agreement is the key to its peaceful resolution. Furthermore, the legitimate security concerns of the neighbours of DRC must be addressed in an overall settlement plan. Hence the regional dimension of the conflict remains of great importance and has informed the idea of an International Conference on the Great Lakes -- a forward-looking Conference which would mobilise international support for a comprehensive solutions for the challenges of peace, security and democratisation in the region.

Meanwhile, the Security Council has scheduled another Open Meeting on DRC which the Political Committee, under the Lusaka Agreement, has been invited to participate at Ministerial level, to help chart the way forward. And in his most recent statement on the DRC made before the Security Council on February 2 2001, with President Kabila in attendance, Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan declared that once a ceasefire has been definitely established and the parties proceed to implement the disengagement of forces agreement made in Harare, Zimbabwe, on December 6 2000, he would be in a position soon to recommend to the Security Council elements of a revised concept of operations to enable MONUC to deploy more fully in support of the disengagement plan.. Time will tell if these optimistic projections would fructify.

I thank you.