INVESTIGATING CONGO CRISIS

By Richard Mgamba
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M23 leader reveals how the Kinshasa regime okayed a robbery to steal $5million from American gold smugglers

Above left to right: General Sultan Makenga (DRC) pictured with Richard Mgamba (Tanzania)

It was seven days before Christmas eve, the period in which Christians all over the world are busy with shopping and planning for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

But to me it was the day I lunched with M23 rebels' top commander, General Sultan Emanuel Makenga. His resume included three different wars in three different countries (Uganda, Rwanda and Congo) but still, as he told me, he was willing to fight till his last blood.

Why, I wondered, and what was driving the engine behind this conflict? Who was paying the piper? What were the source of arms and ideologies?

It was frightening because as a journalist, I was invited into the heart of the conflict, and its orator, and I was risking my life to do so. Courage is often perceived as a normalised characteristics of a good journalist. But we are still human, and through it all, we still fight the other internal conflict – the fear that fights to conquer your mind and heard as you ponder the journey ahead of you.

Yet, it was memorable too, because this was a rare opportunity for me as a journalist. I needed to be fully prepared to get the story, and get out, or end up being a war victim. Earlier, before leaving Kigali, where I had been invited to attend the 25th anniversary of the ruling party, Rwandese Patriotic Front.

But thinking about possible threats, I opted to skip the 25th RPF Anniversary. Securing the interview with the M23 Commander was bigger than attending the celebration of the ruling party in Rwanda, which was merely politics of the ruling elite, the curtain concealing the window to the world.

I made this assignment top secret for security reasons. At the last minute, I informed my news editor, Rodgers Luhwago, via email, that if I don't make it or if I faced any problems, he could, where necessary, set the record straight.

In investigative journalism, security protocols – especially for those involved directly in the assignment – is fundamental for the integrity of the story, and the journalists, and also significantly reduces risks.

From your phone calls to emails, it's important to take precautionary measures to ensure that no leaks get out. Journalists should also make sure that very few people -- especially in the editorial team -- know about the investigation to avoid any leakage by the moles in newsrooms.

Keep your family or friends off the investigation and plan a cover story to feed them because they are not part of the operation or editorial team, and should not be involved in any means.

I had been in contact with my sources within the M23 for some weeks before I got a nod to meet the military head and commander of the 3500-plus rebel forces, Brigadier General Makenga -- a young fighter whose rebellion drew a strong reactions from the Great Lakes regional leaders and international condemnation.

I had been seeking this opportunity as part of researching my book, but also to tell the other side of the story. From what I have read in local, regional and international media, the M23 narrative was told in broken parts, or was entirely missing.

Finally on December 17, this year, I was briefed in my hotel in Kigali by my contact from Goma, about how I would travel to the rebel stronghold in the next day.

My fixer (who I will not reveal for security purposes) had worked in the war-torn country for a decade as a security and humanitarian analyst, and was very familiar with the reality on the grounds.

Entering the war zone to chase a story requires a credible fixer who is both knowledgeable, and highly connected to both sides: the rebels and the government. This is the man who organizes how you travel, where to stay, the people you should meet, and how to minimize the risk while on the ground.
In the early morning of December 18, 2012, our journey started from Kigali, heading to the city of Goma, a home to nearly 1.5 million people, which have seen many devastating wars since the ousting of Mobutu regime started in 1996.

As we negotiated the sharp corners between Kigali and Goma, our conversations were mainly focused on the current Congo crisis triggered by the M23's capture of the town of Goma, before we were interrupted by a phone call from Brigadier Makenga's assistant.

The caller wanted to know where we were, how long it would take us to arrive at the Rwandan-DRC border. This was to ensure that he could organize security details for me to travel from the Rwanda-DRC border of Goma, to the M23 military base.

He briefed me that shortly after crossing the border, I would find him standing behind an unmarked Nissan Patrol truck. (He would later tell me that all executive vehicles for M23 leaders were unmarked for security purposes.)

When the caller who introduced himself as John, a special assistant to General Makenga, hung up, we resumed our talks about the security situation in Eastern Congo. The views of my fixer was that the much leaked UN report authored by a group of experts led by Steve Hague was seriously flawed, aimed at punishing Rwanda and Uganda.

The report, he tells me, as our Land Cruiser hit the road to Goma, was mainly based on the so-called confessions from some defected soldiers who used to work for M23 rebel faction. Now in Congo, where millions of dollars are paid to rebels, it was easy for defecting soldiers to be paid and then coached on what they should say before the UN Group of Experts.

From his views, first of all, there was no credible verification that the alleged defected soldiers used to work for M23. In a country like Congo where there are more than 40 rebel factions, it’s challenging to establish who is working for who until furnished with credible evidence or talking directly to prisoners of war.

But the mere fact of meeting some people on the streets who claim to be working for a certain rebel faction is highly questionable, according my fixer. My stand was that one day time will tell whether Rwanda and Uganda are the main cause of the current crisis in DRC or not.

As my fixer continued to narrate how his country Rwanda has been victimized by some international conspirators, deep in my mind I was pondering Goma, the place where I would soon be walking in its land, in my mission to meet the rebel leader, Brigadier General Makenga.

For the past two decades, Goma residents had witnessed more guns, tanks and rebels making it perhaps the leading city in Africa that has witnessed many wars as well as hosting many refugees at its own peril.

It's infrastructure especially roads have seen more soldiers than contractors, paving the way for potholes and trenches to blossom in this Congolese city whose legacy is clouded with blood, guns and deaths.

Located in the eastern part of Democratic Republic of Congo, and bordering Rwanda in the northern shore of Lake Kivu, Goma city has certainly suffered heavily from man-made and natural disasters during the past two decades.

In the era of Mobutu regime, Goma hosted an airport with the longest airport, which could accommodate Concorde plane. When Mobutu travelled abroad, he would hire Concorde using Goma airport as for his departure and arrival for security reasons.

During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, Goma become the shelter for millions of Rwandese mainly Tutsi and moderate Hutus who fled their country, which was then ravaged by killings of civilians conducted by the Hutu regime. When the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel movement formed by Tutsi refugees in Uganda overthrew the Hutu government in Kigali, forcing its remnants to relocate to the border town of Gisenyi, the battle shifted from Kigali to Goma town.

Goma has also felt the pinch of first and second wars during the past decades as armed militias fought to control the soul of Democratic Republic of Congo -- the richest country in the world in terms of natural resources, but the poorest in terms of human development.

When I arrived here ready to trace and finally interview the military leader of rebel faction, M23, the city was weathering the aftermath of the recent capture by the rebels, who overpowered the 20,000 soldiers from the Congolese national army. Though the rebels have just pulled out of the city pending the outcome of the Kampala negotiations, the legacy of war was still looming among millions here. Some believed this was the end of warring, while others claimed this was a just Christmas break, and the real fight would resume in January, 2013.

However, many people here seemed to sympathize with M23 rebels, calling them liberators, who have come to save them from the poor leadership of Joseph Kabila, a young soldier who took over the presidency after his father, Laurent Desire Kabila was assassinated by one of his bodyguards. As my fixer put it, “This is why when M23 captured Goma: they were welcomed by residents before holding a peaceful massive public rally in the heart of Goma town.”

As we shake hands with my fixer, he tells me, “Good luck in your mission … remember to call me anytime you sense any danger so that I can help.” I was alone with my phones, notebook and pen, ready to cross the border to Congo’s war zone.

As I ponder the situation, just a few hundred metres before I cross the Rwandan side to enter the DRC territory, my eyes capture someone waving for me.

At this border, there were fully armed Rwandese soldiers manning their territory being assisted by the Police and some immigration officer. I greeted them, and answered some few questions from them.
They wanted to know who I was, where I was going, and above all what my business was there. After answering these questions, I was cleared to cross the border.

After crossing the border, I realize that the man who was waving at me, was my host, sent to pick me at the Rwandan-DRC boarder. On the Rwandan side, the border is heavily guarded by armed soldiers from Rwandese Defense Forces (RDF), police and immigration officers. Just few hundred meters in the Congolese territory, the M23 soldiers heavily guard the boarder.

In the Congolese territory, everything was being controlled by rebels. Gone were the days when the government law enforcers like army, police and immigration used to protect this border. To put things into perspective, M23 in Goma was the government within the government because even after pulling out of the city, they still ruled large part of Goma.

My host, whom I later learnt was a senior military officer within the M23, fought for 16 years, before deciding to pursue a degree in Business and Economics by using a pseudo name. He briefed me about the security situation, before our journey started.

“Since we can’t take chance, you will be escorted by six armed soldiers from our troops,” he said. “There will also be a surveillance team monitoring our movement so that in case of any ambush, the team could respond immediately.”

After the briefing, I was shown a brand new unmarked Nissan Patrol, four-wheel drive which would take me to meet the M23 military leader.

“Our vehicles are not marked for security purposes,” said my host, John, as he started the engine, ready for the journey to meet the head of M23 rebels, Brigadier General Sultan Makenga. After few hundred meters, we were intercepted by fully armed M23 soldiers who patrol the area.

They immediately demand who I was and where I was going. After brief discussions with my host cum driver, we are cleared to proceed.

Again after driving for about twenty minutes we were intercepted by six armed soldiers – something that frightened and puzzled me.

“Don’t worry - these are our soldiers,” said John. “I dropped them few hundred meters before I came to pick you at the boarder… They will escort us to the General’s base.”

He opened the doors, and six armed soldiers entered our unmarked car ready to escort us to unknown location where I was scheduled to meet M23 military commander, Makenga.

We drove about one kilometer before we were again intercepted for the third time by over 20 armed soldiers, who proceed to stop our car, demanding to know who I was … and where I was going.

I asked John about what was going on but he calmed me by saying everything was fine. He made some few calls … exchanged some words with these soldiers and we were finally cleared to proceed with our journey.

“These are also our soldiers who are patrolling the area… that’s how we work here to ensure there’s security,” he told me, as he struggled to handle the Nissan Patrol on the dilapidated road.

Contrary to what I thought, it seemed villagers here sympathize with rebels fighters. Most of the time, while we were driving to General Makenga’s base, people were waving and cheering for the soldiers. In some areas they were called ‘Mkombozi’ a Swahili word for savior or liberator.

After thirty minutes, we are intercepted by armed soldiers, in a white land cruiser. They were to escort us, I was told, because we can’t ‘take chances’. Though the war has been halted to pave the way for the Kampala peace talks, still there was no real trust between rebels, and government forces.

Due to the dilapidated roads, worsened by the heavy rain that hit Goma, it took us nearly two hours to reach the rebels’ base. Though the war has been going on here, villagers were just moving on with their daily activities as if nothing happened. Goma’s main activity is agriculture, charcoal and timber trade. On the roads we passed many heavy trucks, some are stuck in the muddy roads, while others fully loaded with charcoal, timbers or foods, cruising at snail’s pace with no fear, despite being in a war zone.

“When you hear reports from Goma, it’s claimed that we are killing, raping people…but what you see here is the opposite,” said John.

“If we were killing these people, or raping them as reported, they would have fled…but you can see them waving for us. We were born and raised here, and therefore we are fighting for these people,” he stated, adding the biggest assets for M23 rebels were neither Rwandese nor Ugandan but the people who are tired of poor leadership, corruption and poverty.

After nearly one hour, my eyes are welcomed by roadblocks heavily guarded by M23 Special forces. Before entering Makenga’s base, we undergo security screening at five different road blocks. As I entered the base, I was welcomed by heavy rainfall and hundreds of soldiers parading as part of their daily exercise before being dispatched to various stations.

“We have arrived…welcome to our home” John told me as he pulled over the Nissan Patrol. Suddenly our vehicle was surrounded by armed soldiers with AK47, Rocket Propelled Grenades and many heavy weapons. I was led to the church-like building, heavily guarded, where I was finally welcomed by General Makenga, a tall, black and slim guy whose red eyes tell who he really is.

As we greet each other, he is fully surrounded by seven armed soldiers, but tells them to leave the area, so that we could start our interview. He also tells me that he doesn’t speak fluent English or French and the only language he knows better is Kiswahili. He sits on the corner of this building, ready for the interview.”
Our interview, which lasts for one hour touches many issues including why he has been fighting the government that he agreed to serve during the Nairobi peace accord signed on March 23, 2009; his reactions about the ongoing Kampala Peace talks and plans by SADC to deploy troops in Goma.

The reason behind the latest fight, he tells me, is because he and his colleagues feel betrayed by President Joseph Kabila’s government which he accused of failing to fully honour the Nairobi Peace agreements.

“We want peace … the Congolese want peace, but if we are forced to achieve peace through the barrel of the gun, we shall fight this war at any cost.” It seemed like the Kinshasa regime is playing games … pending the deployment of the SADC forces in Goma and that’s why they are not fully committed in the Kampala peace negotiations. He tells me adding that, “If the Kampala talks can bring peace, we are ready for peace because that’s how we’ve lived for the past two decades.”

When I ask him about where he gets his support to fight the Kabila’s regime, General Makenga smile before he says, “I know journalists like you, and international community believe we are backed by Rwanda…You have the right to believe anything, but the truth is that we are supported by very powerful figures within the Kabila government.”

“We have very powerful support from the FARDC (Congolese national army) as well as within the Kinshasa government…We get weapons from them as well as financial and intelligence support.” General Makenga tells me confidently, adding that, “our biggest sin is being Tutsis.”

He further tells me, “We are associated with Rwanda simply because of our origin, and I wish I was born somewhere else because I am tired of being judged basing on my ethnicity…I want Africa and the world to understand the bigger picture so that they can help DRC.”

According to Makenga, he never chose to be a soldier fighting for two decades, but was forced by the situation in his country, DRC formerly known as Zaire under Dictator Mobutu. “I have family, my wife and children…I have parents and friends…I love peace and I want peace but when we are forced to get it through the gun, there’s no choice.”

The last time Makenga saw his parents was 15 years ago. They would be forced to flee DRC following the outbreak of the civil war. “We want all Congolese refugees to return home unconditionally including my parents…we want all Congolese to participate on governing and reconstructing their country.

When we end our interview, General Makenga tells me that he has prepared lunch for me. “You are our guest, and the first journalist to come here to see reality….some of your colleagues stay in nice hotels in Goma, but the next morning report things which suit their desires.”

As we sit down to have our lunch - rice, beans and chicken accompanied with bottled water and fruits - General Makenga tells me: “I would like to see an international independent team, which also involves prominent and educated Africans investigating the truth about Congo … I want the truth to be known so that we can be judged fairly.”

“We took Goma in a daylight fight, and there were no children fighting on our side. Few weeks after we captured Goma, I am hearing these baseless allegations, but no one has shown the alleged children recruited by M23. You have visited our stronghold, and where we are right now is our training base, did you see any child soldier here?”

I asked him if he was still talking to President Kabila and his response is, “Yes of course…for the past three weeks he hasn’t called me, but if I want I can call him anytime.”

When we started this fight, Makenga tells me, he was offered two posh houses plus $2million so that he could abandon M23 but he refused. Who offered him this big bounty? He claims President Kabila. “My struggle is not about money, but getting justice to my people, the Banyamulenge” He tells me.

I wasn’t able to verify these claims. Multiple requests sent to Kinshasa regime were left unanswered. Makenga doesn’t end there. He tells me in those good days when they had abandoned rebellion, and integrated with government forces following the Nairobi Peace accord of 2009, one day they staged an armed robbery at the Goma airport to rob some gold dealers who were flying there to buy gold.

According to Makenga, Bosco Ntaganda, told him that he asked for cash from Kinshasa, but instead of being granted his wish, he was given a means to get the money.
“We have clearance from Kinshasa to stage a robbery at the airport...there are gold dealers from Nairobi arriving with about $5 million,” Makenga claims he was told by his then boss, Ntaganda. It happened in February, 2011.

It was a deal involving Casey Lawal, a Nigerian-born businessman currently living in Texas, and a retired Congolese basketball player, Dikembe Mutombo.

The story is not new: The US publication, Atlantic, narrated this story: “Twenty million dollars in potential profit was enough to convince Lawal and Mutombo to overlook the possibility that they were getting themselves into something risky and possibly unethical.

Instead, Reagan Mutombo went to Goma to oversee his uncle’s side of the deal. A few days later, on February 4, 2011, Lawal sent St. Mary to Goma on a leased Gulfstream jet, along with several CAMAC employees and nearly $5 million in cash.

It wasn’t until the plane landed in Goma that St. Mary realized just how deeply involved the Congolese army was in the transaction. “When we got there they came on the plane and took our passports,” says St. Mary.

“They said ‘the general wants to see you.’ We said, ‘general who?’ At that point nobody had even told us. They said ‘Bosco wants to speak to you now.’”

But, from Makenga’s version, that was just a ploy to rob the gold dealers of their $5 million, which they had carried in private jet hoping to secure 4.5 tonnes of gold.

The gold dealers were robbed in Goma in an operation that was closely supervised between Bosco Ntaganda and his top boss in Kinshasa, according to Makenga.

Ntaganda currently in the International Criminal Court custody for war crimes at the time of this robbery, served as both the leader of the CNDP or National Congress for the Defense of the People (which after March 23, 2009 Nairobi peace accord, joined the Congolese government it once fought), and a general in the Congolese army.

He was indicted by the ICC in 2006 for his enlistment, and use of child soldiers in the early 2000s, during the violent closing years of the second Congolese civil war.

When Kinshasa regime decided in 2009 to integrate the CNDP insurgents it had been fighting for two years, President Kabila gave Ntaganda more power than the general already had.

After an agreement between the governments of the DRC and Rwanda (the details of which remain secret to this day), Kabila put Ntaganda in charge of the army’s campaign against the FDLR, the Congo-based Hutu militant group that the Tutsi-led Rwandan government accuses of sheltering fighters responsible for the country’s 1994 genocide, and considers an ongoing threat to national security.

According the Atlantic Magazine publication

“After landing in Goma, St. Mary and the small group of CAMAC employees traveling with him were taken to a hotel owned by Ntaganda. “When we get to the hotel the yard is littered with soldiers and [Ntaganda] comes in looking like Crocodile Dundee with a bolo collar and a leather hat and vest on,” recalls St. Mary.

Ntaganda announced that he was the actual owner of the gold they had come to buy, and that the exchange would take place at the Goma airport the following morning.

St. Mary realized that his chances of leaving the country with four tons of gold were fading. “I told Bosco, you took almost five million from us in Nairobi. We don’t have one gold bar. Give me just one reason to trust any of you in this room,” says St. Mary.

“And he looks me in the eye and says, ‘We didn’t kill you this morning.’”

Ntaganda demanded that St. Mary’s team take at least some of the money they’d left on the plane and give it to him to hold temporarily, supposedly to cover customs, documentation, and routine bribes.

St. Mary, along with one of Ntaganda’s colonels, was sent to the airport to retrieve a suitcase with $3.1 million from the CAMAC Gulfstream -- money that, it would turn out, neither St. Mary nor the Congolese government would ever see again.

It turned out the Colonel who was sent to grab the suitcase at the airport was Makenga.

But, during the interview with UN group of experts, Ntaganda claimed that the entire deal had been a setup, and that he was simply working with President Kabila to entrap gold smugglers.

The day after St. Mary’s arrival, customs officials seized Lawal’s chartered plane, arrested everyone on board, and took the remaining $2 million St. Mary had brought with him.

But from Makenga’s version, having got the news about the planned fake gold deal that was about to happen in Goma, President Kabila told Bosco to plan something so that he could get the money he wanted.

Makenga’s reason for telling me the story, he said, was to show me how in those heydays, he and his boss Ntaganda were very close to President Kabila before they fell out.

After our lunch, we say goodbye to each other. My journey to the Rwandan border resumes.

It’s still raining, but since I was warned by my fixer not to spend a night in the Congolese territory, I have no option but to leave the area as soon as possible.
Few could give it even a passing glance when it first rose against the Congolese regime in early April last year. But its impact was soon to shake the Kinshasa regime, forcing both President Joseph Kabila and UN’s Secretary General Ban Ki moon, separately, to ring President Museveni in July 2012, requesting him to intervene as the M23 rebels were rapidly advancing to capture Goma.

The emergence of M23 rebels, and practical considerations including a fixed reporting deadline and restricted word count, prompted the UN’s group of experts to investigate the source of its power.

First, the Kinshasa regime and international community thought it was led by Jean Boasco Ntaganda, the former rebel leader who manned CNDP, but only months later, it was established that his military Czar was Sultan Emanuel Makenga, 40, who has fought four wars over the past 23 years — and is still counting.

M23, the continuation of the fighting that has dominated the North Kivu Province since the end of the Second Congo War in 2003, is a reincarnation of the National Congress for Defence of the People (CNDP).

In April, 2012 up to 700 ethnic former CNDP soldiers mutinied against the DRC government supported by the peacekeeping contingent of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

These Mutineers formed a rebel group called the March 23 Movement (M23), also known as the Congolese Revolutionary Army, composed of former members of the rebel National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), allegedly sponsored by the government of neighbouring Rwanda.

Its full name is the March 23 Movement, referring to the date peace accords were signed in 2009 between the DR Congo’s government and CNDP, a rebel militia comprised mostly of ethnic Tutsis.

Under the accords, former CNDP fighters were to have been integrated into the national army; but some say they weren’t treated fairly, and that the peace treaty was never fully put into effect — ostensibly because they defected from the army to form the M23 movement.

But who are these M23? Are they really a rebel faction fighting historical injustices, and the corrupt regime of the Democratic Republic of Congo? Or are they a Rwandese proxy army supported and backed by President Paul Kagame’s regime to protect Rwandan interests inside the Congo?

During my investigation to understand the roots, causes and strength of the M23 — which I started officially on 18 December 2012 — the day I met, chatted and had lunch with the rebels’ military head, General Sultan Emanue Makenga, I have had to face two conflicting truths.

On the one hand, the M23 is accused by the UN Group of Experts of being a military stooge of the Rwandese regime, financed, trained and tactically backed by the Kigali government through its Defence Minister, James Kabarebe.

General Kabarebe is the former Chief of Defence Forces and the current Minister for Defence in Rwanda. According to details gathered during my investigation, he was Laurent Kabila’s Chief of Staff during the battle to topple the late Mobutu regime between 1996 and 1997; he is also an uncle to President Joseph Kabila.

I contacted General Kabarebe’s office several times in 2013, in order to interview him about these allegations, but no one was willing to grant me the interview.
The claim that Kigali supported M23, though vehemently denied by the Rwandese government is widely accepted within the UN, some western countries and some African countries, including Tanzania and the DRC itself.

There’s also another theory: M23 is the outcome of the injustices against Banyamulenge that dates back to the colonial era during the 18th century; it’s a struggle of the so-called stateless people, mainly Tutsi from Rwanda whose ancestors migrated to the DR Congo between the 17th and 18th centuries in search for greener pastures. As it stands now, it’s a struggle against the injustices committed by both the Mobutu and Kabila regimes; at once, it’s also a struggle against the so-called “politics of exclusion” for which the M23 rebels put full responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the current Kinshasa regime.

But whether measured by its impacts in the current situation in Eastern DRC, the volumes of reports produced by UN groups and a Western backed Human Rights Watch, or the magnitude of the denial by Rwandan regime, it seems the world has chosen to settle in the first theory -- that M23 is a rebel faction backed by Rwanda, nothing less.

To understand the M23 in detail, I decided to investigate the origins of the so-called Banyamulenge people, their history, struggle and origin. It took me some months of perusing various research volumes written by both African and international scholars, books and interviews with people familiar with the Banyamulenge.

**Banyamulenge: stateless people or Congoese?**

In November 2012, Katy Lindquist, a researcher and coordinator of the Central Africa Conflict Education, has described the Banyamulenge as “a stateless people from South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the Congo-Rwanda border.”

According to Katy, the marginalization and displacement of the Banyamulenge, a Tutsi minority group, from their home in eastern Congo has led to decades of violence in the region.

“The Banyamulenge have faced extreme processes of marginalization due to complex historical struggles, political motivations from both inside and outside the Congo, surrounding catastrophes in central Africa, and a lack of coherent leadership and organization from the Banyamulenge themselves.” She further writes that the Banyamulenge have continually exercised a remarkable amount of agency and have refused to succumb to the role of “victim” that is often ascribed to them.

In his research titled, “The Banyamulenge of the Democratic Republic of Congo: A cultural community in the making”, a Congolese scholar, S L Rukundwa from the Department of New Testament Studies at the University of Pretoria, wrote, “The name Banyamulenge is derived from the word ‘akarenge’ and ‘uturenge’ (in its plural form), which mean small mountain(s).”

In Kinyarwanda, ‘Umurenge’ means a village. According to Rukundwa, historically, in the Kivu Province, the mountain dwellers mainly Tutsi from Rwanda were called bene-turenge or abanyaturenge. These villages constituted an area or a location known as imurenge – and those living in such location were called abanyamurenge.

Historians disagree on the actual date at which the Banyamulenge ancestors entered Congo territory. But it’s believed that the migration took place between the 17th to the early 19th centuries. In his findings, Rukundwa summarises that Banyamulenge migration took place before the arrival (in the region) of western exploration (1857-1858) and well before the partition of the African continent in 1885.

The Banyamulenge people live in South Kivu Province, in the eastern DRC. Other tribes that inhabit the province include, inter alia, the Babembe, Bavira, Bafuliru, Banyindu, Barega, Batembo, Bahavu, Bashi, Babuyu, Banyindu, Barundi, Babangugangu, Bambwari, Banyamulenge, et cetera.

According to various documents and interviews with historians, the term Banyamulenge became more popular in the 1990s when the Tutsi militias who had fought together with Laurent Kabila’s rebel faction launched a rebellion against their ally after the latter denounced and expelled them, just months after ousting the then Zaire regime.

When I met the M23 military chief, General Makenga, I asked what led him to fight the same regime he had supported, what he said was quite revealing: “When the war ended in Rwanda, I decided to fight for my country, the Democratic Republic of Congo ... I moved from Rwanda and relocated to Burundi ... and that's where I met Mzee [Laurent] Kabila. Mzee and I shared the same goal ... to liberate the Congo from the brutal, corrupt leadership of Mobutu, which had almost destroyed the country. That was 1996 when we launched the liberation struggle for the Congo with Mzee Kabila.”

“The Banyamulenge is a term that historically describes the ethnic Tutsi concentrated on the High Plateau of South Kivu, in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, close to the Burundi-Congo-Rwanda border.

The ambiguous political and social position of the Banyamulenge has been a point of contention in the province, leading to the Banyamulenge playing a key role in the run-up to the First Congo War in 1996-7 and Second Congo War of 1998-2003.” Rukundwa wrote in his thesis.

However, most researchers, whom I perused their findings, agree on some key issues regarding the Banyamulenge people: they were good entrepreneurs -- whose main activities combined cattle herding and crop cultivation. They arrived or migrated to the Congo before the coming of the colonialists who divided Africa into spheres of influence following the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 chaired by Chancellor Bismark. Their origin is Rwanda; but they have since lived in Congo’s Kivu Province for 300 years.

In his research, Rukunda wrote, “The relationship between the Banyamulenge and their neighbours was...”
generally good at the beginning. All tribes had developed a system of economic exchange and good neighbourliness … The Banyamulenge were cattle herders, while their neighbours lived on cultivating the land and on hunting.

According to Rukunda, the Banyamulenge introduced barter trade with their neighbours under which they gave cows, milk or meat in return for other forms of food like cassava, banana, maize and beans which their neighbours farmed. Rukunda further writes, “This exchange developed into proper economic ties and friendship (ubgira) with the person offering the goods being called umwira (a friend). Bafuruli and Bavira would bring goods (food or salt for cows) to their Banyamulenge friends and this operation was called gushegura in local language”.

When this form of trade matured, it became friendship as often happens in many African tribes; to avoid possible betrayal, the two sides entered into a ‘blood’ covenant, under which both parties drank blood together using the same vessel as a third party stood there as witness.

In the local Eastern DRC language, this process, according to Rukunda was known as, “Kunywana ighango”, where families involved in this process became one family bonded by a shared ‘cup’ of blood.

“And so no one would harm or even run into conflict with the other. However, in the event of domestic or localized conflicts arising between Banyamulenge and their immediate neighbours, elders from the conflicting communities would sit together and settle issues as they shared a drink (inzoga) … penalties were charged according to the weight of the offence. This would also be followed when two members of the same community had differences. The Banyamulenge was known as the Banyarwanda of Congo.” Rukunda wrote in his research.

The situation changed drastically when the Belgian colonialists took over the Congo. The newcomers capitalized on large tribes such as the Bembe and Manyema even as they systematically ignored the minority, particularly the Banyamulenge.

“Belgian colonization emphasized this stratification. The Belgians manipulated ethnicity to organize and remodel administrative units in the Congo. With Belgian favour clearly given to other larger ethnic communities in South Kivu, the Banyamulenge found themselves divided and dispersed through the South Kivu province with little control over their political situation,” Katy Lindquist of the Central Africa Conflict Education Coordinator wrote.

The theory that it’s the Belgian colonialists who planted the first seed of divisive politics between the Banyamulenge (Tutsi) and their hosts (neighbours) is corroborated by various scholars of the 20th and 21st centuries. Five scholars, Kidogi (1985), Young (2001), Muzuri (1983), Mbonyinkebe (1990) and Rukunda all agree on the following key issues: That during the colonial rule, the Banyamulenge people were consequently represented by their neighbours -- (the Bafuruli, Bavira and Babembe) -- meaning they were excluded from the colonial-led government administratively. They were regarded as mere outsiders from Rwanda and Burundi and hence fell victim to the Belgian colony in a number of ways where they were seen as potential competitors in livestock because they resisted colonial compulsory measures imposed on agriculture.

According to Rukundwa, the Banyamulenge was known as, “The Banyarwanda of Congo or the Congolese Tutsi by their neighbours throughout that period. This name did not bother the Banyamulenge until it became an institutionalized tool for their exploitation and abuse through the ‘politics of exclusion’ and confusion right from colonialism to the post-independence period.”

Post colonial era: Mobutu and Banyamulenge

Under post colonial Zaire under Mobutu, the Banyamulenge continued to struggle for identity, citizenship and political rights as Congolese people. According to our investigation, another contentious issue was land ownership among the Banyamulenge. Following the divide-and-rule system imposed by the Belgian colonialists, natives of the North and South Kivu province who had earlier traded with Tutsi started questioning the latter’s rights to own land in the Congo; they were now considered ‘aliens’ from Rwanda – even though they had lived in the Congo a good 300 years.

“Just like genocide, suddenly the communities that have lived together, traded together and intermarried each other turned against their fellows, asking them to go back to Rwanda,” Tom Ndahiro, the former RPF spokesman who is currently tasked to investigate and document possible signs of genocide in Kigali told me.

Ndahiro, who was born, raised and educated in Tanzania but returned in Rwanda in the 1990s to join the fight against the Hutu-led regime, added, “migration of people among African tribes was common … you have Zulus migrating to Tanzania in 1845 following the Mfecane war in South Africa. You have Manema people migrating from Congo to Kigoma, Tabora and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania during the caravan slave trade. “But, at no time did Tanzania under Julius Nyerere urge these migrants to return to their country of origin … it is sheer absurdity and an act of blatant injustice to expel the Banyamulenge who have lived in Congo for centuries.”

What happened against Banyamulenge under Mobutu could be summed up as follows, according to documented evidence obtained during our investigation:

- **1960:** At independence, negotiations in Brussels—referred to as the Table Ronde (Round Table)—Resolution No 11 stated that Rwandans and Burundians present in the Congo for more than ten years would have the right to vote.
- **1964:** In the constitution of Lualubourg, the country’s first, Article 6 stipulates: ‘There is only one Congolese citizenship. It is attributed, on 30 June 1960, to any person with one ancestor who was or is a member of a tribe or part of a tribe established on the territory of the Congo before 15 November 1908.’ This peculiar language, making citizenship ethnic and linked to the historical presence of a community, persists until today.
• 1971: In this short law—it was one sentence long—of 26 March 1971, the state gave citizenship to all people originally from Rwanda and Burundi who had come to the Congo by 30 June 1960.

• 1972: On 5 January 1972, a law was passed in the spirit of authenticity (Mobutu’s elevation of indigenous culture) that had two articles. Without mentioning the law from less than a year earlier, it contradicted it, saying that citizenship would be granted to Burundians and Rwandans present in the Congo since 1 January 1950, thus effectively reinstating the Table Ronde-era law.

• 1981: This law repealed previous legislation, pushing back to 1885 the date by which an ethnic community had to have been established in the Congo. It also cancelled the collective attribution of citizenship in previous legislation.

• 2004: The transitional government voted a law on citizenship, which is still valid, stating that ‘any individual belonging to an ethnic group whose people and territory constitute what became the Congo’ have right to citizenship, reintroducing 30 June 1960 as the key date in determining citizenship, while it maintained the ambiguous language regarding ethnic belonging and arrival. This law—coupled with the distribution to most Congolese of voter IDs, which then became a valid form of national identification—brought an end to some of the controversy over citizenship. However, given the ambiguity of the 2004 law, and the deep-rooted communal tensions in the region, many still contest the citizenship of Congolese Hutu and Tutsi.

According to our investigation, the 1971 Citizenship Decree by President Mobutu Sese Seko granted citizenship to Banyarwanda who had arrived as refugees from 1959 to 1963, wasn’t received well by the native Congolese in the South Kivu Province as many saw this as an alarming sign of the growing influence of Banyarwanda in the administration, specifically Chief of Staff Barthélémy Bisengimana. In his report titled, “The background to conflict in North Kivu province of the eastern Congo, published by the Nairobi based Rift Valley Institute in 2012,” Jason Stearns stated, “In 1966, a new land law was passed, known as the Bakajika Law. It gave the state ownership over all land, allowing Kinshasa to seize lands abandoned by former owners as well as those deemed to be underused…The Land Law of 1973 radicalized these reforms by rejecting customary titles and making the state the only legal provider of land titles. For customary chiefs in Masisi and Rutshuru, who already felt buffeted by Banyarwanda immigration, this law was a direct threat.

During the same year, wrote Stearns, the Mobutu government launched the equally controversial process known as “Zairianisation”, which led to the nationalization of some of the largest ranches in North Kivu, some of which were later granted to allies of the president.

“Just imagine that you are allowed to vote but cannot vie for any political position simply because you are still considered a Rwandese national despite the fact that your ancestors migrated to the Congo hundreds of years ago…This was simply aimed at isolating Tutsi(Banyamulenge) by those who saw them as a threat to their political survival,” Jean Marie Karenzi, a 76-year-old and a father of eight who is Congolese Tutsi from Goma told me as we discussed the genesis of the M23.

“I am not a supporter of M23 … but some of their demands are genuine and should be fully implemented…at my age, I was born here, grew up here in Congo, but just years ago, I was told I should go back to where I belong(Rwanda). “Today, even you journalists are describing us as Rwandans simply because we are Tutsi: If we are not Congolese then who are the real citizen of Congo?” Mzee K (Karenzi), as he is fondly known around his neighbourhood, asks angrily.

After independence in 1960, Mobutu continually constructed and reconstructed the ethnicity of the Banyamulenge in order to gain greater political power by favouring them during the beginning of his term.
before the fallout in 1988.

During our investigation, we corroborated various reports and interviews, all of which confirm that the change of fortunes against the Banyamulenge, previously seen as the ally of Kinshasa regime, took its full course in the 1990s.

In 1991, Mobutu’s regime worsened community divisions by adopting a policy dubbed ‘la géopolitique’ that reversed the tradition of appointing outsiders to top provincial posts. Following the introduction of this new policy in Goma, a governor Jean-Pierre Kalumbo Mbogho and vice-governor Jean Bamwisho were named from the Nande and Nyanga communities, respectively, while Hunde were also given influential provincial positions.

Just two years after he was appointed governor by Mobutu, Kalumbo Mbogho gave a speech urging the security forces to help the Nande, Hunde and Nyanga against the Banyarwanda. By the term Banywaranda he referred to both Banyamulenge(Tutsi) and Hutus, whose ancestors migrated to the Congo between 16th and 19th centuries.

“The governor’s inflammatory speech was swiftly followed by another by his vice-governor at Ntoto, a village on the border between Masisi and Walikale, where local officials had helped mobilize a militia to counter-balance the influence of Hutu armed groups. This Nyanga-Hunde militia killed dozens of Hutu…. On 20 March 1993 and the violence soon spread, with each community arming itself and carrying out reprisals. At Ntoto, as many as 500 people were killed.

The conflict was dubbed la Guerre de Masisi (the Masisi War), even though violence spread to neighbouring Rutshuru, Kalehe and Walikale territories. The charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors Without Borders) estimated that within three months, between 6,000 and 15,000 people had been killed and 250,000 displaced in the province.” Steam and his colleagues wrote in their report.

“During the 1990s, as ethnic tensions between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi began to rise, then so did tensions about the Banyamulenge’s place in south Kivu. Because of the influx of refugees from the Rwandan and Burundian genocides in 1994 and 1995, the citizenship of the Banyamulenge was violently denounced,” Katy wrote in the paper she published last year.

Between 1993 and 1994 something terrible happened: There was a clear division of Hutus and Tutsi, which was a well calculated move by the both Rwandan and Burundi regimes.

Feeling imminent threat from a Tutsi uprising, especially the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) which started in Uganda, the two Hutu-led regimes in Rwanda and Burundi started rallying supporters on what the Kenyan political analyst Mutahi Ngunyi called “the tyranny of numbers”.

As the Tutsi-led opposition grew stronger in Rwanda and Burundi, there was an uprising in the then Zaire too, from Andre Kisase Ngandou and Laurent Kabila and their rebel faction. According to reliable sources who participated in the two ‘liberation’ wars in Rwanda and Congo, the Hutu-led regime in Rwanda convinced Mobutu that his worst enemies were the Tutsi (Banyamulenge) he had tried to favour, and that they should be eliminated.

In reaction, the then Mobutu regime turned hostile against Banyamulenge and started treating them as ‘betrayers.’ The conflict reignited in 1994, taking on additional national and regional significance, with the arrival of approximately one million refugees from neighbouring Rwanda following the genocide there, including many of the perpetrators of the massacres.

At the same time, hundreds of Congolese Tutsi youths were being recruited into the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebellion that launched attacks against the Hutu-dominated government of Juvenal Habyarimana in 1994. Thus what had begun as a local crisis became entangled in national Congolese politics, further infected by unfolding regional dynamics.

Laurent Kabila, Banyamulenge and politics of betrayal

According to documented evidence, many Banyamulenge youth crossed the border into Rwanda to enroll into RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) training camps, most of them alarmed by the hostility fuelled by the influx of Hutu refugees who participated in the genocide as well as the Kinshasa regime that was also fighting to remain in power at the beginning of the 1990s.

Among those in the first generation that joined the RPF was General Sultan Makenga, the current leader of M23, who joined the Tutsi rebel faction at the age of 17 in Uganda. He was followed by Jean Bosco Ntaganda who is currently in the ICC custody in The Hague, Laurent Nkunda and many more.

During our exclusive interview in his military base in Goma in December, 2012, General Makenga narrated his decision to join RPF in Uganda as follows:

“I dropped out of school and decided to travel to Uganda where I underwent military training for six months … before joining the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in October 1990 … during my service in the Rwandan army, I rose to the rank of sergeant and deputy platoon commander. After the Rwandan war, I went to Burundi where I met Laurent Kabila, the Mzee. We agreed to fight together after he got strong recommendations from my seniors in the Rwandan army. I fought alongside the Ngaruma battalion, which was managed by the Rwandan army under James Kabarebe.

“As I said earlier, after we ousted Mobutu, Mzee Kabila changed his position against us, saying all foreigners who fought the war, including us, should leave the country because we were not Congolese.

“We fell apart and decided that we were going nowhere because Congo was, and still is, our home, which we are ready to die fighting for… I joined this struggle 22 years ago, when I was a small boy aged 17. I first fought against Habiyarimana’s regime in Rwanda that wanted to kill all Tutsis. I was a member
of the Rwandan Patriotic Front. I joined the organisation in 1990 in Uganda because I didn’t like the Habyarimana regime as well as the Mobutu rule.

As the attacks on the Banyamulenge community became increasingly violent in 1993, more and more Banyamulenge followed the young Makenga’s path by joining the RPF. “We had two missions … to stop the Hutu regime from eliminating Tutsi in Rwanda and, secondly, to fight the Mobutu regime … which had turned hostile against our people,” General Makenga told me.

When the Rwandan war ended in July, 1994 following the ousting of the Hutu regime, Makenga and his colleagues had to make a difficult choice -- to return home to launch a struggle to liberate their country.

But they needed strong backup from their counterparts in Rwanda, who had just taken power. “Though we didn’t have money or weapons, we had expertise in war and the morale to fight,” he told me. Before starting their fight against Mobutu, Makenga and his colleagues recruited young Tutsi from Congo who were then trained by the RPF regime in Rwanda.

“When we were still pondering over our future, there came an opportunity … Mzee Kabila had resources (money and weapons) but we needed soldiers to fight. But since we were both fighting the same enemy (Mobutu) we joined him quickly and launched an offensive from Goma,” General Makenga told me.

In July, 1996 the first confrontation between RPF-trained Banyamulenge troops (that would later evolve into the AFDL) and the Congolese troops took place. After this first confrontation, the 1996 Banyamulenge rebellion took off; their troops began attacking and taking over major Congolese cities such as Bukavu, Goma, and Uvira. This battle, which was then joined by Rwanda and Ugandan troops came to be known as the “First Congo War.” It had started as a small rebellion in Goma only to regain identity before it escalated to nationwide struggle against the Dictator Mobutu regime.

By the time Kabila took power in late 1997, Rwanda’s presence in Eastern Congo had become very powerful … and so did the Banyamulenge. By the time Kabila took power in late 1997, Rwanda’s presence in Eastern Congo had become very powerful and so did Banyamulenge.

“Muzee (Kabila senior) looked like a Rwandese stooge before the eyes of the Congolese … though he has helped topple the oppressive Mobutu regime, many Congolese saw him as a proxy leader of Rwanda,” a senior military officer from the Congolese national army who is close to the ruling elite in Kinshasa told me in July, this year.

To prove that he was a man of his own, Kabila made a controversial decision; he expelled all foreign troops from the Congo in July, 1998 despite the fact that these troops were the ones that put him at the ‘throne’. Kabila never ended there. He also revoked the Banyamulenge citizenship and ordered them to leave the Democratic Republic of Congo immediately, which did not only anger Rwanda and Uganda but also ruffled the “mountain dwellers” from Kivu Province. “All of us Congolese fought for the same goal … we won the war, we were branded Banyamulenge … a group of Tutsi that is disobedient. We were called foreigners by the same man whom we had supported … and then we were told to return to Rwanda where we belonged. This was very painful.”

Such is how General Makenga recalls how they fell out with Laurent Desire Kabila. Narrating how the fall-out occurred, General Makenga further told me at his military base, just 40km outside Goma:

“I was born in Congo, grew up in Congo, then went to Uganda to join the army in order to fight against the then Rwandese regime that wanted to eliminate all Tutsis … hoping that one day we could also initiate a similar struggle to liberate our country, Congo, from the brutal leadership of Mobutu. You help someone to become president through the gun, but when he tastes power, you become his first victim.”

General Makenga added: “Mzee Kabila was a politician … I am not; I am a soldier … and the only language I know is that of the gun. My home has been in the bush … fighting injustice and corrupt regimes in this region. Therefore when a politician wants to play politics with me, my response won’t be the political podium but the barrel of the gun because, that’s my way of fighting for my rights.

“I strongly disagreed with Mzee Kabila when he ordered all Banyamulenge to leave Congo because they are Rwandese … so we fell out. My colleagues and I decided to fight his regime after he betrayed us.”

Summing up the ordeal of the Banyamulenge, Katy Lindquist put it this way:

“The history of the Banyamulenge in many ways reflects the larger history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Banyamulenge, an extremely small minority group in eastern Congo, have played central roles in the politics of both Mobutu and Laurent Kabila. “Time and time again, the Banyamulenge have attempted to improve their livelihood in the face of extreme processes of manipulation, discrimination, and violence. Though there are few Banyamulenge left in eastern Congo, their presence around the world has not been ignored.”

How Laurent Desire Kabila outsmarted his ‘godfathers’

As the newly formed post-genocide regime struggled to build a country reduced to ashes by the 1994 killings of over 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus, nearly one and half years since the Juvenal Habyarimana regime was ousted, Rwanda’s strongman Paul Kagame was not settled at all.

Though he has managed to stop the genocide as well as ousting the Hutu-led regime that planned and executed the killings, still those who masterminded the deadly human disaster were still at large, with majority of them settled in neighbouring Congo.

By coincidence, the rebellion against Joseph Desire Mobutu, a cook’s son who later called himself ‘Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga’ meaning
the all-powerful warrior who goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake, was mounting as his health deteriorated. During that period, Mobutu Sese Seko was suffering from advanced prostate cancer as his power waned dramatically amid the already worsening rebellion against his regime.

Back in Kigali, there was a crisis meeting at an undisclosed place, which was chaired by Paul Kagame, then Defence Minister and Vice President. The agenda: To pursue all the genocide suspects in Congo and bring them back to justice and to consolidate resources to support the rebel factions, which were operating from Goma town. But there came a question: Who should ‘be trusted,’ says a senior military officer who was among the invited people into the crisis meeting held in Kigali nearly 18 months after the genocide.

“From the very beginning, Kagame didn’t trust Kabila at all … he was highly concerned by Kabila’s credibility,” a senior military officer who declined to be named told me in Kigali. “He (Kagame) saw Kabila as a manipulator, and corrupt leader whose interest was to accumulate wealth once he gets into power.”

After discussions, Kagame came up with a list of the men who should ‘could trust’ to lead the transitional government if and when Mobutu was ousted. On the top of the list was Andre Kissasse Ngandu, a prominent rebel fighter with revolutionary credentials, who was also the president of the AFDL’s military wing and the National Resistance Council (CNRD), the senior military officer told me.

But my source says the news was leaked to Kabila that he wasn’t the first choice to lead the new Zaire should Mobutu go. “Somebody tipped him that he was the second choice …rom that point Kabila carefully planned the elimination of Ngandu in a way that later left Kagame with no choice but to accept him as the leader of the rebellion against Mobutu,” the senior military officer further told me.

General Ngandu was assassinated on 4 January 1997, in North Kivu by Rwandan Tutsi soldiers in what was coordinated by Kabila. During the assassination, Kabila’s position was that of spokesperson and head of the political wing. The claims by the senior military officer from the Rwandese Defence Forces (RDF) are corroborated by two different sources who participated in the plan to back the rebellion against Mobutu’s regime during the so-called First Congo War.

According to Gerald Mbanda, a media consultant and commentator on political and social issues in the Great Lakes region in 1996, a coalition of Congolese dissidents came together to form the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL). This alliance consisted of three rebel groups, namely, the National Council of Resistance for Democracy (CNRD) led by Andre Kissasse Ngandu; the Revolutionary Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MRLZ) led by Anselme Masusu Nindaga; and the Democratic Alliance of the People (ADP) led by Deogratius Bugera.

“Kabila is said to have become the head of AFDL out of the blue after the assassination of his boss, Andre Kissasse Ngandu. At the time, Andre Kissasse Ngan-

After Ngandu’s death, Kabila appointed himself president of CNRD as well as spokesperson and head of the political wing,” Mbanda told me last July.

“Kabila new from the beginning that he wasn’t the choice of Rwanda to lead Congo … there were two choices, but when the news leaked out, Kabila organized the killing of the first choice before informing the Kinshasa regime through his sources that the man who was about to take over was a senior military officer within the Mobutu regime,” another senior officer who fought alongside Kabila who is currently serving in the Rwandese intelligence circles told me in Kigali, confirming earlier revelations that Laurent Kabila wasn’t the main choice of Rwanda and Uganda.

According to this intelligence officer, after the elimination of Ngandu, Kabila also sensed that there was another threat to his quest to become leader of DR Congo: The threat was an army General working within the Mobutu regime -- but who had been indoctrinated by the RPF for some years.

The officer who because of the nature of his job as a security analyst requested anonymity, said: “Kabila told the Mobutu regime through his sources that there was a mole in his army planted by Rwanda and (that) he was being prepared to lead Zaire … the next day, the officer was assassinated in Kinshasa.

“We were left with no option but to support Kabila though we never trusted him from the beginning … to play safe, he claimed that once the Mobutu regime was ousted, he would not take over as leader of the Congo.”

This, according to my sources, was how Laurent Desire Kabila manipulated his way to the throne despite being disliked by his ‘Godfathers.” How Kagame knew that Kabila wasn’t a credible leader is not known clearly, but earlier, a Cuban fighter who came to Congo with 100 fighters to help overthrow the Mobutu regime, Ernesto Che Guevara, branded him a womanizer and drunkard.

In Che’s diary, only published in 1999, he notes the lack of organisation in the group and the fighters’ belief in magic. Mr Kabila was rarely there. He sent letters promising everything, but delivered nothing. “I no longer believed anything after all these promises,” wrote Che in his diary. “Nothing makes me think he is the man for the situation. He lets the days pass without concerning himself with anything other than political squabbles, and all the signs are that he is too addicted to drink and women.”

After the Simba rebellion failed, Mr Kabila turned to smuggling gold and timber on Lake Tanganyika. He ran a brothel and bar in Tanzania and did some petty trading in Uganda. He developed a taste for fine wine and stylish clothes.
From Laurent Nkunda to General Makenga: How M23 was born

When the Rwandan government fell out with Laurent Kabila—the man it had armed and supported all the way to the presidency—it launched the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD, Congolese Rally for Democracy) against him in the Kivus in August 1998, in what came to be known as the ‘Second Congo War’ that lasted five years.

The Rwandan side was commanded by the then young army General, Paul Kagame, who at the age of 39 years also doubled as Vice President and Defence Minister. Having led the battle to capture Kigali as well as stopping the 100 dark days of Genocide in Rwanda, to build a secured Rwanda but also pursue those who committed genocide, Kagame decided that it was time to support the battle to topple the Mobutu regime, who by then had also formed an alliance with Hutu militias who had fled to the Eastern Congo.

"The painful thing to us was that as poor as we are, we used our resources to support the fight against dictator Mobutu … but what we got in return was being called intruders, meddlers and plunderers of the Congolese resources, "a senior military officer who by nature of his job requested anonymity told me at Kigali’s Lemigo Hotel.

The senior military officer added: “People have forgotten so soon especially the so-called international community and our own neighbours … what we spent in arming and supporting Laurent Desire Kabila runs into millions of dollars … but nobody asks where this money came from.”

Those accusing Rwanda of plundering Congo’s resources are being very naïve … in fact, the Congo should pay Rwanda for its contribution if earlier agreements were to be honoured,” another senior official from Kigali who fought in Congo and is currently working at the Security department told me in Kigali.

But during our investigation, we could not find any written agreement between the Rwandese regime under RPF and the Congolese rebels signed before the former committed its resources to fight the Mobutu regime alongside Congolese rebels.

According to our findings, Rwanda supported the Congolese rebels to oust Mobutu because of its own national interests, namely, internal security. Since many Interahamwe militias and soldiers of the ousted Hutu-regime fled to Congo’s Kivu Province under the umbrella of refugees, Rwanda felt unsecure and needed a strong ally in neighbouring Congo to pursue these militias, the majority of whom committed genocide in 1994.

Citing the Second Congo War, Stearn and his colleagues wrote, “Both sides contributed to this new conflict, but Kabila provoked it when he asked all Rwandan troops to leave the country in July 1998. This triggered the deadliest war in modern African history. It involved eight nations, more than two dozen armed groups, and caused the deaths of millions of people from violence, disease, and starvation.”

Rwandan officials, led by top military officers including James Kabarebe, realized it would be difficult to secure their western border as long the Congolese...
Hutu community continued to collaborate with the ex-Kigali army and Interahamwe who had participated in the genocide, who rebranded themselves as the Alliance pour la libération du Rwanda (ALIR, Alliance for the Liberation of Rwanda). This label was used until they changed their name again in 2001 to the Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR, Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda).

After the death of Laurent Desire Kabila in January, 2001, his son Joseph took over, amid qualms among warring rebel factions if he would follow his father’s path or would launch a new initiative to bring all Congolese together in building a new country.

According to available documented evidence, when the peace agreement was sealed in Lusaka, Joseph Kabila was tasked to lead a transition government up to 2006, during which there would be a general election.

The three-year transition process—culminating in the 2006 national elections—caused deep divisions within the RCD, as its leaders clashed over whether they continue to participate given the perceived bad faith of Joseph Kabila’s government or disassociate themselves from the Kinshasa regime.

Fearing persecution and discrimination, many RCD fighters especially Banyamulenge resisted the integration within the Congolese army because they knew that was just a ploy to bring their own enemies closer, before being eliminated. But they also thought integration would erode their political and economic power, especially among those who considered themselves ‘original’ Congolese.

In August, 2003, RCD suffered a major setback following the defection of three senior military officers, among them General Laurent Nkunda, a Tutsi from Rutshuru territory. Nkunda, along with some members of the RCD leadership, created a new quasi-political movement in just four months after their defection that came to be known as SNPC, National Synergy for Peace and Concord.

According to Stearn and his colleagues, Rwanda, then driven by an amalgam of economic, security, and political interests was also afraid of losing a foothold in the Kivus, and so threw its weight behind these dissenting officers after it was disappointed by Professor Wamba Dia Wamba, a lecturer from University of Dar es Salaam who was earlier backed by the Kigali regime to lead RCD movement.

Professor Wamba was unanimously elected head of the rebel Rally for Congolese Democracy in December 1997, which was backed by Uganda and Rwanda and was then based in the town of Goma. However, the RCD gradually was later torn into two factions, after Professor Wamba fell out with his backers in Rwanda when he accused the regime of having limited focus of just overthrowing Kabila, instead of introducing a democratic regime.

In May, 1999 Émile Ilunga was named the new head of the RCD, which forced Professor Wamba to flee to the Ugandan-controlled town of Kisangani. The faction of the RCD he still controlled was variously known as the Movement for Liberation (RCD-ML), RCD-Kisangani, or RCD-Wamba, while Ilunga controlled the RCD-Goma.

Formation of the SNPC was the beginning of the two leading rebel factions which would influence greatly the security in North Kivu: CNDP, National Congress for the Defence of the People between 2006–2009 led by Laurent Nkunda, and the uprising of the M23, early last year led by General Makenga.

Nkunda’s mission (in forming the CNDP) was to protect the Congo’s Tustsi ethnic group (Banyamulenge) and FDLR, the main Hutu-led military opposition to the Tutsi-led government of President Paul Kagame in Rwanda. The FDLR, though a severely degraded force from what it once was, has its roots in Rwanda’s 1994 genocide when several hundred thousand Tutsis and Hutu moderates were slaughtered by extremist Hutus.

Following complaints by the Kinshasa regime as well as the international community, mainly the United Nations, that Nkunda was an obstacle to a secure and peaceful Congo, the Rwandese regime arrested him in January, 2009 and placed him under house arrest till today.

“The arrest of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s notorious rebel leader General Laurent Nkunda removed a major impediment to peace in one of the world’s most war-torn countries. The fact that he was arrested in Rwanda also helps the government of President Paul Kagame restore a reputation severely tarnished last month, when the U.N. accused it of arming and supplying men to Nkunda and using him as a proxy inside Congo,” writes Alex Perry of the Time Magazine on January 23, 2009 in an article headlined, “Behind Rwanda’s Arrest of Nkunda”.

Nkunda, a flamboyant figure and a Congolese ethnic Tutsi was also accused by the Kinshasa regime of being a Rwandan proxy. After Nkunda was arrested, the leadership of CNDP automatically fell into the hands of his colleague, Jean Bosco Ntaganda, also known as ‘the terminator.”

Bosco Ntaganda who had been indicted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague in January, 2006 on three counts of war crimes allegedly committed while he was helping to command another rebel group in Congo’s Ituri region, a time when he earned the sobriquet “the Terminator”, replaced Nkunda in the peace negotiations in Nairobi.

Two months later, the peace deal was signed between the Kinshasa regime and Ntaganda’s CNDP in March, 2009. Following this deal, CNDP transformed itself into a registered political party and their forces integrated within the Congolese national army, FARDC.

However, nearly one year after the deal was signed some top CNDP military officers led by General Makenga complained of being mistreated, discriminated against and targeted for elimination. They also accused Bosco of having secret, corrupt agreements with President Joseph Kabila. Narrating their dismay with the Kinshasa regime on implementation of the Nairobi peace accord, General Makenga tells me:
“Finally, after fighting for some years, there was a peace deal, which we signed on 23 March 2009 in Nairobi, Kenya. This deal had some conditions attached to it, including the implementation period. Some of us were integrated in the most corrupt, ineffective, and ill-disciplined Congolese national army, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC).

“We agreed that all Congolese refugees, including our parents, should be allowed to return and settle peacefully. We agreed that the working conditions within the army should be improved. We agreed that the government should fight corruption, starting from the top levels instead of dealing with petty corruption. We agreed that good governance should be established, and many more conditions.”

General Makenga adds: “When we reminded the Kinshasa regime about fulfilling these conditions, we became enemies of the state. The biggest problem with President Joseph Kabila is that he doesn’t want to be told the truth. When you tell him the truth, you become the enemy.”

When I ask Brigadier General Makenga about claims by the UN group of experts that M23 was a proxy army of the Rwandese regime, he borrowed the lawyers’ words: Denial is the best defence.

“My biggest sin is having had a history of fighting in Rwanda under the Rwandese Patriotic Front, and secondly being a Tutsi. Because of that, I have become a target of being a Rwandese stooge. I am not that much educated, but I can assure you that the so-called Group of UN Experts [who investigated the fighting in DRCongo] is biased … working to fulfill the needs of those who sent them, instead of seeking a balanced truth that can help heal the wounds in DR Congo,” Brigadier General Makenga says.

“The truth is that I have been receiving strong support from the Congolese national army, and also from some government officials in Kinshasa who are not satisfied with the way things have turned out under President Kabila...When the Kinshasa government buys new weapons, I also get a share of it through my own contacts within the Congolese national army. General Hamis’ case is just a tip of the iceberg… there is more than that.

The Congolese army is the most corrupt, weak, divided in the world; and remember it was formed by former rebel fighters from different backgrounds.”

Brigadier General Makenga says as he tried to deny any support from Rwanda.

[A UN panel of experts report released late in 2012 revealed that top Congolese army officers were behind the exploitation of “conflict minerals.” General Gabriel Hamis Nkumba, the then second in command of the Congolese army, was specifically named by the UN report to be at the centre of the illegal exploitation of minerals fuelling the conflict in the east of the country. The report quoted President Kabila as publicly recognising that “the involvement of criminal networks within his forces, the FARDC, in illegal exploitation of minerals has caused conflict of interest in the army’s constitutional mandate”].

“Let the world demand more evidence of our so-called wrongdoing than just phone-call records … and testimonies from defectors who have been paid to say what their masters want them to say. Don’t I communicate with people or friends? I do. Today I’m in good contact with President Kabila, but does that mean he supports us? Ask those who have fought with me, I am a man who knows the guerrilla war and who is ready to fight with anyone. Those who think I am funded by Rwanda or Uganda have their agenda to drive, which differs sharply from my motive in this struggle,” Brigadier General Makenga tells me.

Brigadier General Makenga’s stand on the evidence adduced by the UN group of experts is also shared by Rwandan President Paul Kagame, who says he has so far never been shown any concrete evidence that prove his country’s backing of the M23 rebellion in Eastern Congo.

In May, this year, Kagame was quoted by the UK’s Observer newspaper as saying the UN report was the ‘stitching together’ of rumour, speculation and lies, and why it is the decades of Belgian, French and American involvement in that blighted country that are the real causes of its problems.

“I’m telling people … look at themselves in the mirror … they are the ones responsible for the problems in Congo, not me,” he was quoted by the Observer newspaper, as saying.

“Up to this moment they’ve never given anybody a bit of what they’re talking about – evidence,” Kagame says.

According to General Makenga, their struggle is also the struggle of many Congolese people who share M23 beliefs and motives.
"The Congolese are tired … they want peace, stability and a better life. Look at this arable land in Goma, why can’t this area be turned into Africa’s agribusiness zone? He shows me the Greenland of Goma as the rain poured the war-torn area.

But with its dilapidated infrastructure, the people of this area have remained trapped in a chain of poverty. People talk about Congo’s vast wealth, mainly minerals and timber, says General Makenga, but in reality they are wrong because the Congolese people are very poor.

"It doesn’t help the Congolese to say their country is the richest in the world, while in reality they have no roads, hospitals, schools and suffer dreadful living conditions," he argues.

With a population of about 75 million people and a Gross Domestic Product of $25 billion, an average earning for a single Congolese or per capital income is about $230, according to a report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) released in 2012.

But in terms of natural resources, according to a report by the world’s respected business and economic affairs magazine, Forbes, The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a vast country rich in natural resources, with an estimated $24 trillion worth of untapped deposits of raw mineral ores, including the world’s largest reserves of cobalt and significant quantities of the world’s diamonds, gold and copper.

This amount is more than the Gross Domestic Product of the entire European Union, which in 2012 was $16.66 trillion, but still DRC is the poorest country in the world.

"You have seen for yourself how we are supported by the villagers in this area, contrary to the international reports that we have dispersed or disrupted villagers. We are surrounded by villagers all the way you have seen people going on with their activities as usual. Our soldiers interact with villagers, and they are supported by the villagers because the people are tired with the Kinshasa regime," General Makenga boasts as he explains the support his M23 enjoys from the communities.

This is the story of mountain dwellers, the Banyamulenge. M23 is their continued struggle against what they see as historical injustices dating back to the colonial era and General Makenga is a man who claims to be fighting for their rights, after Laurent Nkunda was arrested in 2009 and Jean Bosco Ntaganda surrendered himself to the ICC.

But for how long will they fight?

"No one is born to fight a war till his last day on earth, but people are forced by circumstances that surround them to start a fight. I shouldn’t be seen as a man who doesn’t want peace. I have a heart, a family, and people I care about. But as I said earlier, if the Kampala peace talks fail, the only option we have is to fight till the last man.” Brigadier General Makenga tells me as we end our interview.

When genocide ideology moved to Zaire

When the Hutus led regime collapsed in Rwanda In 1994, its top leaders who fled to Eastern Congo formed an alliance with the Mobutu regime and their main mission was to eliminate all Tutsi remnants.

To understand what followed, we came across a written testimony headlined, "The Last Survivor: The Banyamulenge", posted on the website of the Huffington Post newspaper, authored by Justin Semahoro Kimenyirwa -- a Congolese refugee who was resettled to the United States in June, 2011.

"I would like to tell you about my home and my people," he declared.

"I was born in Minembwe in the Democratic Republic of Congo -- over the mountains of the land, deep within the green fields of South Kivu. It is a land full of green vegetation, lush forests, and beautiful wildlife. Between the greenery, numerous rivers always flow among mountains and flat land.

We have just two seasons - the rainy season and the sunny season - both marked by favorable temperatures. Throughout the year, a nice breeze offers comfort each morning. Within this peaceful land, there exists a community that struggles to survive. These are the members of the Banyamulenge tribe - they are my people.

‘The Banyamulenge have lived on the lands of South Kivu for five centuries. It is the home of our grandfathers, our ancestors - the only home we know, but one that is not acknowledged by our neighbors or our government.

They believe we have no right to live in Congo, constantly insisting that we return to our “real” home far from the lands of South Kivu. This unprovoked hatred of the Banyamulenge people has been the cause of indescribable suffering and massive killings of my people.

"In 1996 war began in Congo … a war which continues to this day and one in which a malicious group called the Mai Mai seeks to eliminate the entire Banyamulenge Tutsi tribe.

The Mai Mai is a group of many tribes in the South Kivu region (Abafurero, Ababembe, Abanyintu, Abashi, Abarega) that joined together with Interahamwe (Hutu’s who fled from Rwanda after they carried out the Rwandan Tutsi Genocide in 1994).

Together, they started attacking Banyamulenge villages … killing men, women, and children, taking our cattle and burning our homes. While they attacked our villages, those Banyamulenge who lived in other areas of Congo were captured, jailed, and in some cases, killed."
My brother, Bizimana Mavugo, was one such Banya-
mulenge … he was arrested in the town of Kalemie
and was killed by machete along with 81 others.

They were buried together in a single grave.

“In 1998, my own village was attacked. I remember
the sound - shouts, the intensifying beating of drums,
guns firing at those who tried to escape.

Suddenly, the sound of my father’s voice: telling us to
run, to each fend for our own life. There was no time
to say goodbye.

“I ran through the bullets, past the attackers who were
shooting us, toward the forest we call Nyarubari.

I thank God I was not shot. In the forest, I stood with
my cousin, Bogabu, waiting in the darkness for the
silence that would signal the end of the attack.

I was content to wait there, alive. But Bogabu was
less patient. After sitting in silence for several hours,
he insisted on walking out to see if the attackers had
left. I pleaded with him to stay put, but he was older
and he insisted he was going.

As soon as he emerged from the bush he was shot.

“He cried out for me, but I could not help him for fear
of being killed myself.

“Of course, I could not return home and so I moved
through the forest … comforted by the protection of
God’s great trees. I went to a town called Uvira. There
were other Banyamulenge in Uvira and I thought I
would be safe there.

A group of children I encountered upon my arrival in
the village, proved this thinking incorrect.

“What are you doing here?” They asked, already
moving toward me with machetes.

“Do you think this is your motherland?” Even young
children are trained to hate the Banyamulenge.

“I decided that it was better to be killed running than
to stand still and wait for death. And so again, I ran.

It was not until after I escaped that I realized I had
been struck in the leg by a machete that had been
thrown at me. I was lucky.

Other Banyamalunge who had approached Uvira, suf-
fered a much worse fate - their bodies hacked apart
while they were still alive or burned - simply because
we are Banyamulenge and these others do not want
us in their country.”
The Congolese government deliberately ignored the warning about fresh rebellion by ex-National Congress for Defence of the People (CNDP) rebels, which was issued fifteen months before the outbreak of the M23 insurgency that rocked the war-torn country last year.

The warning stated clearly that ex-CNDP fighters could rebel against the Congolese government with which they had sealed a peace deal on 23 March 2009 in Nairobi, but no concrete measures were taken to prevent the rebellion.

Details gathered during our investigation also confirmed that to secure a peace deal, the Congolese regime ‘bribed’ the ex-CNDP rebels the control of the lucrative mineral-rich areas in both North and South Kivu.

These findings are also corroborated by the detailed report by the UN Group of Experts released in November, 2010 which among other things also warned of the looming rebellion by ex-CNDP rebels.

In its report the Group of Experts warned: “There are fears the ex-CNDP could go back to war against the Congolese army.”

The warning came after revelations that ex-CNDP rebels who had since been integrated into the Congolese national army were still in control of lucrative mining businesses as well as maintaining secret battalions and arms caches. How serious was the Group of Experts warning taken by Congolese government as well as the international community is a billion dollar question.

But, what is clear is that if the Congolese army acted on the warning, there country wouldn’t have fallen into the M23 mess, which has cost lives of innocent people as well as threatening peace within the region.

The UN group also found that the minerals-rich areas were purposely awarded to CNDP top soldiers by the Kinshasa government as one of the measures to encourage them to integrate into the Congolese national army as agreed in the 2009 Nairobi peace deal.

To put things into perspective, Joseph Kabila’s regime, desperate to win the 2011 election in a ‘peaceful environment’ offered the ex-CNDP rebels the mineral-rich areas to court them into signing the Nairobi peace accord.

“The former CNDP controls its own arms caches and has been opposing orders by the official army command to redeploy to areas outside of the Kivus…The Group of Experts identified three “hidden” battalions that are absent from official Congolese army organizational structures and under the exclusive command of ex-CNDP officers.” The 2010 report says.

Details gathered during our investigation established that the Congolese government as well as the international community allowed a peace deal agreement, which gave ex-CNDP rebels leverage to control their own arms caches.

These arms catches were kept “off the loop” within the Congolese national army. Not only that but also ex-CNDP rebels remained with three hidden battalions, which were not reporting directly to the Congolese national army.

These secrets battalions reported directly to Jean Bosco Ntanganda and Sultani Emanuel Makenga, meaning despite being integrated within the Congolese national army, the top rebel commanders were still controlling their own army.

But, fifteen months later when the ex-CNDP rebelled against the Congolese national army, under the umbrella of a new organisation called M23, Congolese as well as the UN embarked on what ambassador Carson called an “emotional grandstanding and finger pointing.”

“If the Congolese government was serious enough, we wouldn’t have this thing called M23 … we were warned several times that the ex-CNDP rebels were planning another rebellion, but we didn’t listen,” One of the top Congolese diplomats who served in foreign affairs ministry up to 2011 told me.

The top diplomat who was once a rebel fighter said: “These people (M23) were allowed to control our minerals in Kivu, but the money didn’t go to the national army … it went into their pockets and they later used it to destroy our country.”

“You can’t rule out Rwanda’s hand in the rebellion … but we as Congolese government are the cause of our failure … the international community also bears the blame in what happened last year in Goma,” He further told me.

The authorities in Kinshasa didn’t reply to our several requests we sent through emails. And so did the Rwandese authorities. For the past five months, we tried to contact the relevant authorities in Rwanda and Congo, but whenever we raised our questions, we ended up in a dilly-dallying situation.

But when I later asked one of President Kabila’s top security officials about why his boss agreed to give
ex-CNDP rebels the lucrative mining areas just to court them into signing the Nairobi peace accord, this is what he told me over the phone: “The President and the people of Congo were committed about peace and that is why we sacrificed our minerals to bring a lasting peace.”

The official who requested that his identity be protected added, “It’s true that we were desperate to secure peace, but remember desperate times call for desperate measures … it was a great gamble but we had no choice.”

It’s the first time the news about how Kinshasa regime ignored the looming rebellion at its own perils is revealed.

The creation of M23 and the cosmetic peace deal
For the 22 years that Brigadier General Makenga fought the war in his native Congo and partly in Rwanda, he spent most of this time fighting in the Kivu Province, giving him connection within and outside the region as well as ‘knowledge on financing rebellion.’

Having joined the army at the age of 17 about 23 years ago when he was recruited as a Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) fighter in Uganda, Brigadier Emmanuel Makenga who until February, last year, was just a colonel within the Congolese army, earned experience as a guerilla fighter in the Eastern DRC.

His fight, he claims, was inspired by historical injustices committed against his people, the Banyamulenge community, who according to documented evidence suffered the brutality and politics of exclusions dating back from colonial times and right into the Mobutu and Kabila regimes.

My fight is against injustice brought about by the Kinshasa regime, Makenga told me during our interview, adding that he joined the struggle 23 years ago, when he was a small boy aged 17 after dropping out from school and relocated to Uganda where he was recruited by the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPF).

“I have been fighting all these years because we want peace and stability for our people and our country … but if we cannot achieve our goal through mediation, we are ready to fight till the last man,” Makenga declared.

The Makenga generation believes it’s the victims of the political conspiracy against Banyamulenge in Congo, which was first initiated by the Belgian colonialists, before it was calmed and later on revived by former Zaire dictator Mobutu.

Not only that but also Laurent Desire Kabila, continued with the so called historical injustices against the Banyamulenge, when he ordered them to return to where they belong, that’s Rwanda and also revoked their citizenship.

But Joseph Kabila, a man also accused of being Tutsi, decided to do the opposite: he wanted peace with his common enemies, especially the Banyamulenge sometime referred to as a Tutsi with Rwandan origin, after they rocked his leadership for eight years, under their political organisation known in its acronym as CNDP.

The man in charge of the eight years rebellion was Laurent Nkunda, a Seventh Day Adventist evangelist but who abandoned the bible in exchange for guns and bullets, to fight for what he believes are the rights of the Banyamulenge.

Threatened by the presence of the Hutu militia— Forces for the Democratic Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), which embarked on an operation to finish the unfinished business in South and North Kivu after the 1994 Rwandan genocide, Banyamulenge feeling unsecured formed their own means of defence. Apart from Hutu threat, Congolese Tutsi also saw another enemy in the Kinshasa Tutsi regime under Kabila, which
A Rwandese journalist currently living in Canada once told me how Nkunda delayed an interview with him because Betty was seriously ill. “We waited for two days in the bush for the interview because his lamb was sick ... finally we got him,” he told me in Nairobi.

Narrating about the arrest of Nkunda, the New York Times’ Jeffrey Gettleman wrote, “The surprise arrest could be a major turning point for Congo, which has been mired in rebellion and bloodshed for much of the past decade. It instantly strengthens the hand of the Congolese government, militarily and politically, right when the government seemed about to implode ... But it could also empower other, even more brutal rebel figures like Jean Bosco Ntaganda, General Nkunda’s former chief of staff, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague for war crimes.”

As Gettleman put it, the end of Nkunda’s era paved the way for the emergence of two dangerous faces: Ntaganda and Makenga, the men whose rebellion came to haunt Congo as well as the international community nearly three years after the arrest of Nkunda.

When Nkunda was arrested in Rwanda as part of a new deal to have a lasting peace in Congo, Makenga was left as a lone ranger because the former was his mentor and a trusted ally.

When the Nairobi Peace accord was signed on March 23, 2009, Makenga and his former boss, Jean Bosco Ntaganda, agreed to be integrated into the Congolese army with one major condition: they would remain serving the Congolese national army in Kivu Province, not anywhere else.

But according to details gathered during our investigation, Makenga was suspicious and uncooperative: he couldn’t buy the integration process following the arrest of Laurent Nkunda.

“We knew President Kabila very well ... he was desperate to win the election ... so he needed a peace deal with CNDP before the general election...After the election he had hidden motive,” Brigadier General Makenga told me during our interview.

To court Makenga, it’s believed that the Kinshasa regime gave him the control of the mineral-rich areas in both South and North Kivu.

I asked Makenga about this claim during our interview and this was his response: “I wasn’t bribed ... I just negotiated for a better deal because I knew President Kabila and his people very well.”

Part of the deal ... apart from control of minerals ... was to make Makenga who was then a Colonel in charge of ‘Operation Amani Leo’ meaning peace today, which was aimed at fighting and disarming all militias in the Kivu province, including the Hutu rebels of FDLR.

But group of experts found that senior commanders within the Congolese national army, FARDC, believed Makenga was purposely given the control over minerals rich-areas in order to make him cooperate with integration programme.

To control the minerals business, Makenga had his man called Colonel Claude Mucho.

“In interviews with the Group, FARDC officers suspected that Makenga was given direct control over this mineral-rich area in an attempt to ensure his cooperation with the CNDP integration process, despite Nkunda’s arrest in January 2009... FARDC officers interviewed by the Group maintained that Mucho had explicit control and direct financial interests in the gold mine at Matili and the cassiterite mines at Nkunwa, Nyambembe, Nduma, Luntukulu and Lukoma (near Nzibira).” The group of experts’ 2010 report says.

But, generally, something wrong happened with the integration process, which Kinshasa regime either because of being desperate, didn’t see it. Allowing Makenga and Ntaganda to remain in the area they have been war-lords for years, was a grave mistake, according to a senior Rwandese military officer, because their power and support wouldn’t be neutralized during the integration process.

“They were integrated theoretically but practically they remained active rebels who used the opportunity to study the strength of the Congolese national army, which they have been fighting for nearly a decade." The Rwandese military officer who participated in two different operations in Congo conducted jointly by Rwanda and DRC told me in Kigali.

“Theirs was suspicious marriage ... nobody trusted each party, but for the sake of peace, they had no choice." The Rwandese Military officer who declined to be named for security reasons told me.

Following the Nairobi peace deal in April, 2009, ex-CNDP underwent accelerated integration into FARDC and the Congolese national police (PNC) but the integration faced a significant absence of transparency from its initial stages.

For instance while CNDP leadership gave the Congolese government details showing that it has only 5,276 soldiers, the actual figure was twice this number. According to details gathered during our investigation, which are also corroborated by facts from UN group of experts, the actual number of fighters within CNDP was 11,080 before the integration.

To put things into perspective, ex-CNDP soldiers within the FARDC was an army inside the army, which re-
The assassination provoked grief and outrage throughout the Makenga faction of CNDP, according to interviews conducted by the Group whereby on 14 September, Lieutenant Colonel Antoine Balibuno was assassinated in Goma by former CNDP officers close to Ntanganda on his way to the latter’s home. Lieutenant Colonel Balibuno was a close member of Nkunda’s inner circle during the CNDP rebellion. At the time of his death, he was in charge of civil-military affairs for the Amani Leo.

Makenga then decided to pursue a secret mission by recruiting all loyalist soldiers whereby in February 2012, he has about 850 fighters most of them former CNDP guerilla soldiers. Alarmed by the sharp division within the CNDP and elusive peace after the 2009 Nairobi deal, Makenga embarked on recruitments as well as seeks support from local chiefs and other rebel factions.

This process according to our investigation was coordinated secretly by Makenga between 2010 and 2011. One of the rebel factions that Makenga gained his support was FRF, which was under the command of Colonel Makanika, a notorious war-lord in Kivu.

Since the integration allowed Makenga and Bosco to be integrated within the Congolese army but remained in Kivu province with their troops, which were also integrated within the national army, it became easy for him to mobilize forces.

As the Rwandese General put it, this wasn’t integration but something akin to integration.

By the end of 2011, Makenga says he had recruited 850 soldiers including a battalion of special force formed with about 200 well-trained soldiers.

When he was ready with his secret mission, the next move was to have political backup. “My business is to manage the army, but to succeed we need more educated and respected leader to manage our political affairs.” Makenga told me.

In January 2012, which was just three months before the rebellion, neither the Congolese Military Intelligence nor the National Intelligence had the clue about what was going on, despite the early warning issued in 2010.

**Financing the M23 rebellion**

I asked him how much money he had during the mutiny: “We had enough dollars to pay salaries … this money came from our supporters inside and outside the Congo … but we had business plans to raise more money to finance our operations.”
And, the business plan was to introduce taxes to all trucks that entered their territory as well as to all businesses who trade there -- a move which by October, last year, was earning Makenga and his troops an estimated $10,000 a day --- enough to create havoc to the Congolese regime.

But that wasn’t it: Makenga and his team had a network of mineral dealers using Kampala and Kigali cities to transact their businesses during and post integration; he didn’t disclose how much this network contributed to their organization.

“There are others who can speak about that…I am mainly responsible in the army.” Makenga said, avoiding direct answer about how much minerals smuggling contributed to their M23 movement.

With illegal minerals and charcoal trade estimated at $57 million changing hands yearly between Makenga, Ntanganda and dozens of top Congolese national army officers, financing the rebellion was simplified.

In November 2010, the UN group of experts revealed how the Congolese national army and rebels were making millions of dollars from illegal mining business at Bisie Mine in Eastern Congo, all estimated at an annual $29 million.

The masterminds of this illegal business were ex-CNDP soldiers led by Ntanganda who had earlier been integrated into the Congolese national army following the March 23 Nairobi peace agreement. The report also names General Hamisi Gabriel Kumba of being the ringleader of this illegal network.

“Congolese army units are competing among themselves for control over mineral-rich areas,” the UN group report says.

Between September 2009 and June, 2010, for instance, the Congolese army units made up of former rebels from the CNDP gained control over mineral-rich areas in North and South Kivu province.

There was also another secretive network -- arms smugglers of arms within the Congolese national army. Having spent three years within the Congolese national army, Makenga came across corrupt and dishonest army officers willing to sell weapons to the rebels.

Even after Makenga mutinied against the Congolese army where he also walked away with enough weapons to stage the war, he continued enjoying support from the smuggling network, provided that he bankrolled them with thousands of dollars.

“The truth is that I have been receiving strong support from the Congolese national army, and also from some government officials in Kinshasa who are not satisfied with the way things have turned out under President Kabila. When the Kinshasa government buys new weapons, I also get a share of it through my own contacts within the Congolese national army,” Makenga boasted during our interview.

He added: “General Hamis’ case is just a tip of the iceberg ... there is more than that. The Congolese army is the most corrupt, weak, divided military in the world ... remember that it was formed by former rebel fighters from different backgrounds.”

A report by UN experts reports said late last that top Congolese army officers were behind the exploitation of the so-called “conflict minerals.” The UN report specifically named General Gabriel Hamis Nkumba, the then second in command of the Congolese army, as the man at tetehe centre of the illegal exploitation of minerals fuelling the conflict in the east of the country. The report quoted President Kabila as publicly recognising that “the involvement of criminal networks within his forces, the FARDC, in illegal exploitation of minerals has caused conflict of interest in the army’s constitutional mandate”

As regional and international pressure piles on the so-called ‘blood minerals’ in the Congo, calling for more sanctions on those involved in conflict minerals, rebel factions have since a new source of revenues: the plunder of the country’s forests to produce charcoal and timber.

During my brief stay at an M23 stronghold at Rumangabo just few kilometers outside Goma town, I came across dozens of trucks carrying charcoal and timber, all produced from the rebel-controlled areas. The M23, for instance, has a special battalion that monitors the charcoal and timber businesses and collects revenues from traders.

In 2010, the UN group of experts estimated that charcoal trade in Goma town was valued at $28 million annually. In Goma, a sack of charcoal weighing some 90kg is sold at $25.

“Local environmental NGOs informed the Group that charcoal from the park constituted at least 80 per cent of the Goma market, representing a total value of around $28m annually. As charcoal made from the hardwood found in the park has a longer burn capacity, its value is much higher than that of charcoal made from eucalyptus trees,” the group reports in 2010.

The biggest casualty in this man-made environmental disaster inside the Congo is Virunga national park, where rebels as well as the Congolese national army soldiers have been competing for the $28m charcoal trade.

This plunder cost over three million cubic metres of trees a year, according to UN statistics. In 2010, more than five FARDC commanders made a profit of $700,000, according to details obtained by the group of experts.

According to a comprehensive study by an international NGO and a local university, nearly 50,000 tons of charcoal is sold each year in Goma alone, where over 97 per cent of the population of half a million relies on it as the only source of energy.

Virunga national park alone produced about 80 tons of charcoal every week between 2009 and 2011; all this charcoal belonged to ex-CNDP rebels and FARDC commanders.

“Authorities informed the Group that they estimated that about 80 tons of charcoal from the park was sold
each week at their market alone … local residents in Kitchanga stated that nearly all the charcoal from the park was sold to the wives of high-ranking FARDC officers within the 22nd Sector...

At times, those officers simply ordered the local population to produce directly for them without payment, according to the same sources. As with the timber trade, trucks owned by FARDC are exempt from all taxes on their way to Goma. While each sack is sold at $3 locally and resold in Goma for $25, the Group estimates that the Bwiza market alone produces over $700,000 in annual profit for the commanders of the 22nd Sector of FARDC," the UN group says.

So with a network of arms smugglers within the Congolese national army, a control of lucrative mineral areas, illegal trade in charcoal and timber, a web of businessmen interested in illegal deals in the Congo, introduction of taxes and knowledge about the Kivu province, Makenga became the ringleader of the army, while his bosses planned how to raise funds and gain more support from their rebellion.

Finally last year, Makenga launched a rebellion against the Kinshasa government after what he called “failure by President Kabila to fully honour the Nairobi peace deal.” With the 2011 election annoying some Congolese politicians loyal to the Banyamulenge rebels, the rebellion was truly imminent.

With Makenga’s boss, General Ntanganda, being a wanted man for allegations of war crimes, he became the most preferred man to lead the M23 rebellion.

By July, 2012, when the UN group of experts released its interim report on Congo, Makenga’s M23 had over 2500 soldiers — ten times what he had when he mutinied against the Congolese army. The M23 had effectively become the centre of the Congo’s crisis, especially when the rebels captured Goma town in November, last year, before they were forced to withdraw in December, the same year.

A warning had been issued over a possible rebellion, but it was snubbed. The rebels had control over vast mineral, timber and charcoal trade. They also had secret battalions and arms caches, which were not reported to the Congolese national army top leadership after the integration. Above all, they had troops loyal to them; what followed was obvious, but it dismissed as a passing cloud. But when it rocked Kivu province, there were desperate calls from President Kabila to President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, seeking a helping hand.

The beginning of emotional grandstanding

Johnnie Carson, former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, speaking about the escalating conflict in the Eastern Congo on December 11 last year, ten days after the M23 withdrawal from Goma, said: “The dialogue on how to resolve the Congo crisis has become unhelpful and polarizing. It has dissolved into emotional grandstanding and finger pointing.”

In December, 2011, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appointed a group of experts comprising of six members to among other things monitor the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the period 2012.

In July 2003, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1493 which, among other things, imposed an embargo on military support to armed groups involved in the latest fighting in the DRC’s Kivu and Ituri regions. The following year, on 12 March 2004, the Council passed Resolution 1533 which created a Group of Experts (GoE) and mandated they work cooperatively with other UN agencies and States in the region to gather information about the flow of arms in potential violation of Resolution 1493.
The GoE mandate also instructed the GoE to make recommendations to help States in the region comply with the embargo and identify potential violators of the embargo. For several years, the GoE reported back to the Council annually with interim and final reports. A series of Security Council Resolutions extended the GoE’s mandate and expanded it to include human rights abuses, child soldiers, recycling of ex-combatants, and mining and minerals smuggling in the DRC.

The GoE has historically taken a comprehensive and diplomatic approach, gathering data and making constructive recommendations in this complex, war-torn region. On 29 November 2011, Resolution 2021 again reauthorized the GoE to investigate the situation in the war-ravaged DRC, and produce a comprehensive report before the end of 2012.

By the time of the appointment of the GoE in November, 2011, there wasn’t any rebel faction in the Eastern DRC called M23, but there were more than a dozen rebel groups operating in the minerals-rich Kivu province.

According to details gathered during our investigation, nearly four months since the GoE started its investigation, M23 rebels emerged after former CNDP soldiers who had earlier been integrated into the Congolese national army, FARDC, following the Nairobipeace agreement of March 23, 2009.

On 23 March 2009, the Government of the DRC and the CNDP, an armed militia group in eastern DRC formed primarily to protect the security interests of the Tutsi population against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), signed a peace treaty wherein the CNDP became a political party. As part of this agreement, CNDP soldiers were integrated into the DRC military (FARDC). In April 2012, a group of soldiers from the original CNDP faction, citing poor treatment and a breach of the 2009 treaty, mutinied against the DRC government and formed a new group called M23.

It is important to note that the creation of M23 and the escalation of conflict in eastern DRC began during the research phase of the GoE work mandated by Resolution 2021.

“We decided to focus on this new rebel faction…our aim was to understand its leadership structure as well as who was behind it inside and outside Congo.” One of the members of the GoE that was appointed in November, 2011 told me in June, this year.

The member who declined to be named said, “Though in our final findings there wasn’t any concrete proof but the testimonies from some of the defected rebels, which we corroborated strongly confirmed that Rwanda was behind this new rebel faction.

When the UN’s Group of Experts dropped its bombshell about Rwanda’s support to M23 rebels in mid last year, there was mixed reactions with Western countries calling for the freezing of aid to the East African nation while some took the pause, waiting to see the unfolding episodes.

Few days before the bombshell, on June 2012 Human Rights Watch and Congo’s Ambassador to France accused the UN of suppressing an Addendum to the GoE’s Interim Report, which was naming Rwanda as the force behind the M23 insurgency in DRC.

According to details gathered during our investigation, the next day, The GoE’s Interim Report was submitted to the President of the Security Council but there is no accusation of Rwandan or Ugandan support for M23 rebels.

On June 26, last year the Chair of the Security Council Sanctions Committee submitted to the President of the Security Council a 47-page Addendum to the GoE’s Interim Report, which accused Rwanda of directly supporting M23. But, Uganda is not mentioned.

When I asked my source who was part of the GoE team about what really transpired behind the scene, this is what he told me: “There were disagreement on whether Rwanda was directly involved in supporting M23…but there was also some powerful politicians from the US government who didn’t want Rwanda to be named because they thought the evidence wasn’t sufficient.”

“When we noticed this situation, some of us leaked the report to the media as well as France and Congo… the leak was aimed at suppressing those powerful forces.” He told me adding that GoE doesn’t work as prosecuting authority, and therefore it doesn’t need what lawyers call water-tight evidence to win a case. “We weren’t prosecuting anyone…we were just researching and reporting what we hear from the fields.” He further told me

On May 28, last year nearly three weeks before the GoE report was tabled, British Broadcasting Corporation became the first media house in the world to break the news that Rwanda was supporting DR Congo mutineers or M23. The story cited an internal UN report, though it didn’t mention any involvement of Uganda.

The BBC’s breaking news about Rwanda’s support to M23 corroborates with what our source within the Group of Experts says. But, surprisingly, two days after the story came out, the UN spokesman, Penangnini Toure, denied the GoE report contains such claims and dismisses accusations that the UN tried to cover up these findings.

Speaking to Voice of America, Toure stated, “the UN did not produce a report saying that Rwanda is directly involved in what is happening in eastern Congo.”

Again on July 30, 2011 an anonymous Congolese diplomat at the DRC embassy in London, in response to an inquiry about Uganda’s role in the conflict, tells the Ugandan Correspondent, “Our preliminary intelligence reports…suggest that there may indeed be some Ugandan soldiers who entered our territory for reasons that are not known to us.”

Finally on October 17, 2012, UK news agency, Reuters published an exclusive article claiming to have seen a confidential 44-page GoE report that states “both Rwanda and Uganda have been supporting M23” and that Bosco Ntaganda and Sultani M -
engaged "receive direct military orders from Rwandese Defence Force’s Chief of Defense Staff, General Charles Kayonga, who in turn acts on instructions from Minister of Defense General James Kabarebe."

**Rwanda’s crocodile tears**

As Rwanda and Uganda launched defence campaign to clear their images, the former suffered heavily when donor countries suspended aid in a bid to implement key recommendations by the UN’s Group of Experts. Both countries published the UN’s Group of Experts report, with Uganda, through its Prime Minister writing a strong-worded letter to the Secretary General Ban Ki moon threatening to withdraw their peace keeping forces in Somalia and elsewhere.

In a bid to repair its damaged image before regional and international community, Rwanda through its foreign affairs minister Louis Mushikiwabo released a 28-page rebuttal challenging the authenticity, methods, data points and personal bias of some of the members especially Steven Hague, a man seen by Kigali as FDLR sympathizers for years.

“Indeed, the release of the addendum served as the latest act of a carefully orchestrated media and political strategy to cast Rwanda as the villain in this new wave of tensions in Eastern DRC. In effect, the addendum only added a UN stamp of approval to a narrative that had been actively and deliberately propagated since the beginning of this latest crisis” The rebuttal, which we obtained its copy read.

It is in this way, stated Rwanda in its defence, “that evidence is retrofit to a predetermined narrative...Inconvenient or contradictory facts are ignored or, most often, never sought in the first place”.

“Given the deeply flawed and illegitimate nature of the process described above, the GoE’s interim report, addendum and anything that builds on it should be treated publicly and privately as biased and devoid of integrity.”

In its response to the GoE’s report, Rwanda further stated, “Another glaring weakness of the addendum is that it contains damning allegations against named Rwandan civilian and military officials without providing them with any opportunity to respond.

The fact that the report could cite DRC “Intelligence Sources” and anonymous “Congolese Officials” more than 50 times without feeling compelled to consult their Rwandan counterparts, some of whom stand directly accused, is one of the most telling aspects on the nature of this addendum.

Then there was a personal attack against the UN’s group of experts team leader, Steven Hege. “It is clear that [Mr. Hege’s] views (which were available on his website until they began to be disseminated to a wider audience, at which point they disappeared from the Internet) not only inform the analysis in the interim report but also thoroughly influence the conclusions of the first addendum as well as parts of the second addendum...The policy implication of these views is quite alarming, and they have no place in a report issued under the imprimatur of the United Nations.”

Steve Hege was the chairman of the UN’s group of experts on DRC, who spearheaded the 2012 report. In its rebuttal Rwanda accused Hege of being biased and sympathizers of the Hutus rebel group, Forces for Democratic Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), which majority of its leaders and founders were the mastermind of the 1994 genocide.

One day, after an online media, Inner City Press, revealed the previous report authored by Hague in which he strongly defended the Hutu rebel faction of FDLR, one of the report was removed online.

During our investigation, we decided to find the previous reports, which were authored by Hege about FDLR. On February 24, 2009, Hege through his foundation known as Peace Appeal authored a report titled, “Understanding the FDLR in the DR Congo: Key facts on the disarmament and repatriation of Rwandan rebels”, in which he says, “Consistently linked to the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the FDLR are better understood in relation to the massive revenge killings of Hutu refugees in the eastern Congo from 1996 to 1999. Following the destruction of the refugee camps in the Kivus, the RPF systematically hunted down, often bating with promises of humanitarian aid, and slaughtered over 300,000 Hutu civilians.”

“The FDLR feel deeply betrayed by the Congolese government’s new collaboration with Rwanda and this will continue to negatively impact their treatment of the local population. Were it not for the military expertise of ex-FAR officers, who trained the majority of Mai Mai groups in the Kivu, the RPF might have toppled the government of Laurent Kabila. Throughout the recent conflict with Rwanda’s proxy army of the CNDP, the FDLR’s role as a principal defender of the Congo was reaffirmed.” Hege further wrote.

In his two-page report, Hege seemed to defend FDLR, a move seen by the Kigali regime and its allies as sympathizing with those who committed genocide.

The details gathered during our investigation show that just one day after the issue of Hege’s credibility emerged, his report about FDLR was removed on his website.

Addressing the UN Security Council on August 29, last year, Rwandan Foreign Affairs Minister Louis Mushikiwabo, said, “We are aware that this is not the first time the issue of impartiality has arisen with respect to the Group of Experts mechanism (e.g. Somalia/Eritrea and Sudan). We would argue, however, that the case of the DRC Group is by far the most egregious and straightforward case to date...We acknowledge that experts will bring an array of preconceptions and biases to the table, some favourable to Rwanda’s position and some not.”

Mushikiwabo added, “We also acknowledge Mr. Hege, as a private citizen, advocate, academic or activist, is fully entitled to his point of view. But Mr. Hege is not acting in his capacity as citizen or activist. Instead, he occupies a position of great importance and sen-
It is in this context that Steven Hege’s writings have emerged — and we are confident that you will agree they place his views of Rwanda, post-genocide politics and the FDLR on the extreme fringe. They do not fall within acceptable boundaries. “Mr Hege himself acknowledged the serious implications of his uncovered writings by attempting to take down evidence from a website where his fact-sheet on the FDLR had been hosted. Unfortunately, he underestimated the power of the Internet. Several Rwandan bloggers and concerned citizens took the initiative to keep a record,” Rwandan Foreign Affairs Minister further said.

In some of his reports posted online, Hege regards the Rwandan government as illegitimate foreigners — Ugandan Tutsi elite is his phrase — in language eerily familiar to survivors and students of the genocide; He also believes the Hutu rebels, FDLR are predominantly victims, and not perpetrators, of violence, Rwandese authority claimed.

“It is both ironic and remarkable that, through his appointment to this most sensitive and elevated position, Mr Hege has, a mere three years after he wrote these words, found himself in a position to bring his prophecy to life.” Mushikiwabo further told the UN Security Council.

But, whether Hege was the right man to chair the UN’s group of experts or not, is upon for readers to judge. Following Rwanda’s reactions, the UN’s group of experts was prompted to respond by forceful, point-by-point rebuttal by saying, “The Rwanda’s rebuttal is characterized by a tone of general disdain for the Group’s work and its methodology... Rwanda’s rebuttal seeks to distort the conclusions of the Group’s investigations so as to portray them as if they “hinge on” specific minor details”.

“As per its previous commitments, the Group has made clear its willingness to correct and/or clarify any information within the categories which may be required following additional research...Nevertheless, the Group does not share the view that any of the arguments in the Rwanda’s rebuttal would convince it to alter any particular elements or overall categories of the Addendum.” The UN’s group of experts said in its rebuttal to Rwanda’s reactions.

But as senior lawyer from the country’s Ministry of Justice put it in Kigali during our discussions about the report, “Rwanda’s rebuttal was just crocodile tears, which vanish into the river. “We should be focusing on damage control because at this point nobody will believe our side of the story.” Martin Ngoga, Rwanda’s Prosecutor General told me in Kigali. But even the damage control was also beyond repair.

Facing donor’s wrath

Following the release of the Addendum to the interim report, the US announced in July, last year it would not provide $200,000 in foreign military aid to Rwanda for the remainder of 2012.

Few weeks after the release of the final report, the United Kingdom also announced a suspension of aid amounting to $33 million to Rwanda, citing a breach in agreements. However the UK resumed majority of the aid in March, 2013.

The World Bank delayed Board consideration of $125 million in funding though in March 2013, it voted to release $50 million to support social welfare programs in Rwanda. African Development Bank’s Board of Directors also suspended a $38 million budget support payment for Rwanda while the European Union initially suspended all aid to Rwanda in September, last year, before reinstating some support in February 2013. But, EU’s $90 million in direct budgetary support remains suspended.

Germany also initially suspended a 3-year, $28 million commitment before reversing the decision in February 2013 after meeting with Rwanda’s top leadership. During that period, Sweden suspended $14.7 million while the Netherlands suspended $6.2 million in development support. The Belgium government announced in September last year it was ending its military partnership with Rwanda because of the UN’s Group of Experts report, a move publicly criticized by Belgium’s own Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

After the series of aid suspension done by western countries, Rwanda still denied any involvement in the latest Congo’s crisis with President Paul Kagame, the once darling of the donors, regarding his country as the victim of what he terms diplomatic Lynch mob.

“It’s just a circus. You start wondering about the people you’re dealing with,” President Kagame was quoted by the UK’s Observer newspaper in May, this year.

What disturbs President Kagame was decisions by western countries to suspend aid to the projects they have declared a success. What, he told the Observer, does that have to do with Congo? “How does affecting aid help deal with those things they are complaining about? It’s simple logic. It doesn’t make sense,”

“One thing that will never be said openly, but is a fact, aid is also a tool of control. It’s not completely altruistic,” he says. “If a country’s giving us aid it doesn’t give them the right to control us. I mean it. I can say thank you, you are really helpful. But you don’t own me.” He was quoted by the Observer.

Uganda joins the battle

As UN and Rwanda treaded on the attacks against each other, Uganda too joined the fray, questioning the evidence, methodology and above all the findings by the Group of Experts. “Where’s the evidence for their claims? Some of those so-called experts came here and did not interview anyone...Where’s their authentic facts to back those claims? Those accusations are absolute rubbish, hogwash.” Ugandan military spokesman Felix Kulayigye said on October 17, 2012.

Then there was another strong worded response from Uganda’s top diplomat Okello Oryem on the same day the country’s military spokesman blasted the
UN’s report: “They are making up these rubbish allegations because on the ground in the eastern DRC there is the biggest number of UN peacekeeping operations in the whole world with the largest budget in the whole world, and [yet] they have failed to do anything in the past five to ten years…They are blaming their shortcomings on Uganda and Rwanda. They should get on with their job of what they are there to do in the eastern DRC instead of blaming others.”

Uganda didn’t end there. On November 1, 2012, one day before M23 captured Goma, Uganda tasked the country’s Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi to write a strong worded letter, in which he said, “We were disappointed not only by the content of the report but more so by the manner in which the so-called UN Group of Experts conducted themselves during and after their research …. Uganda categorically denies the allegations against her because they are totally false …. Our recent involvement in the issues of DRC was at the express request of the UN Secretary General and that of President Kabila when they both, separately, rang President Museveni in July 2012, requesting him to intervene when the M23 rebels were threatening to attack Goma …. in order for Uganda to continue contributing to Regional efforts, we need understanding, respect and fairness from the UN or the region itself or both."

Wrongfully accused or guilty as charged?

In reading between the lines, the rebuttal from Rwanda and Uganda, we established during our investigation that both countries raised the issue of accuracy and evidence. This brought the question on whether the report, which accused the two countries of supporting M23 rebels, had reliable evidence or not.

I posed this question to my source who was among the Group of Experts, which researched and authored the report, and this what was his response: “At that point we were convinced that what we gathered as evidence was enough to crucify Rwanda…remember we interrogated some ex-combatants who confessed that they were given weapons and trainings by the Rwandese Defence Forces”

“We corroborated their confessions and established that Rwanda was indeed involved…we didn’t have any form of evidence apart from their confessions as well as our own research done by tracking telephone conversations between some Rwandese officials and top M23 leaders.”

But in its report titled, “Assessing the 2012 UN’s Group of Experts report on DRC: An Analysis of Methodology, Cooperation and Implications” the Howard G Buffett Foundation strongly questioned methodology, and evidence used by the experts to reach into their conclusions on who was behind the M23 rebels.

But, on whose interest it did commission experts to assess the 2012 UN group of experts’ report remained unclear. In its introduction the Foundation wrote, “Like many donors with interests in eastern DRC, we were very anxious to read the 2012 UN Group of Experts (GoE) Final Report… We fully appreciate how complex it is to conduct field research in the midst of conflict. We also understand how difficult it is to gain a complete and accurate picture of all of the dynamics at play in this chaotic region. We therefore wanted to understand if and how the GoE’s recommendations should inform our future grant-making and commissioned an independent review of the report’s process and findings. The results of that review, contained herein, leave us frustrated with the deterioration of cooperation and diplomacy reflected in this most recent GoE process."

“We are disappointed by much of the resulting media coverage which has oversimplified the source of conflict and its solutions. We fundamentally disagree with the punitive response by bilateral donors. We do not feel holding back the development of countries in the region helps achieve what we all want for the people of eastern DRC: lasting peace and economic prosperity. Our Foundation is not interested in apportioning blame for what we view is a fundamental failure in the GoE process in 2012; we will leave the point-counterpoint on questions of fact to others.” The Foundation further wrote in its introduction.

In its analysis and evaluation, the Foundation, says it didn’t attempt to assess the validity of any specific content in the reports, but sought to answer the following questions: Did the GoE employ a sound methodology and adhere to its UN mandate?

Did the GoE’s 2012 Final Report adequately respond to criticisms and rebuttals of its 2012 Interim Report and Addendum?

Did the most recent report’s content accurately represent the broad range of factors contributing to conflict in the DRC? The Howard G. Buffett Foundation is a private family foundation working to improve the standard of living and quality of life for the world’s most impoverished and marginalized populations.

The Foundation claims that its report was prepared by independent, third-party organizations with no affiliation with any of the state and/or non-state actors or organizations cited herein. The Foundation engaged Lake Partners Strategy Consultants and the Crumpton Group LLC, as well as other individuals and institutions with deep experience in the region, to review the GoE findings and provide feedback. The Foundation also provided input to this analysis based on our 14-year history working in the region and our frequent field visits to the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda, particularly over the last year.

In its finding, the Foundation wrote, “Much controversy has surrounded the pedigree of specific GoE claims and supporting data points. At the core of these point-counterpoint analyses is the argument that the GoE were overly reliant on unnamed sources, without explanation of these sources’ motives or impartiality.”

But in its final report and addendum, the UN’s Group of Experts says, “The Group conducts exhaustive and in-depth field research in zones controlled by armed groups, seeking at all times to rely on authentic documents and, wherever possible, first-hand, on-site observations by the experts themselves, including photographs. and, … the Group systematically assesses the credibility of each of its sources and remains wary of deliberate efforts to influence its findings.”
The untold story of how a $17 billion mission failed in Congo

Dressed in dusty black T-shirt and skirt, Victorine, a mother of four, leans back against the fence of Sotraki Stadium, just few kilometers in the outskirt of the besieged Goma town, pondering how she could raise her children, after her husband was killed during four days fiercely clashes between Congolese national army and M23 rebels that took place in May, this year.

As Victorine and her family tried to escape what she describes to the officials from Medicines San Frontiers as “flying bullets and bombs” her husband was killed, leaving her mourning at the internal displaced camp at Sotraki Stadium while pondering being widow with a burden of four children aged between 2 and 10 years.

“We heard bombing, we were scared,” she says. Bullets were flying and bombs were dropping on houses”. She narrates her ordeal to the officials from Medicine San Frontiers in June, this year.

Victorine, a resident of Kibati suburb, in the northern of Goma town, is among 5000 women who are currently sheltered at the internally displaced persons(camp) at Sotraki Stadium amid a looming humanitarian crisis as United Nations’ peace keeping forces prepare to confront the M23 rebels.

She is among millions of civilians who have been forced to flee their homes in the Eastern Congo despite the deployment of the world’s second most expensive peace forces to tame the growing insurgencies during the past few years.

In 1999, alarmed by bloody war in the war-torn Congo, inside the Norwegian Room located at the UN’s headquarters in New York, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1279 establishing the Peace keeping Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo known by its French acronym, MONUC.

With fresh memory of the failure of UN’s force in Rwanda in 1994 Genocide in which about 800,000 people were killed, the 15-members of the Security Council adopted the resolution to rescue DRC from becoming another human’ abattoirs.

Among the Mission’s mandate in eastern Congo was neutralizing armed groups through an Intervention Brigade(introduced last year to accommodate SADC forces), helping to establish a Rapid Reaction Force within the Congolese national army (FARDC), tasked with eventually taking over the responsibilities of the Intervention Brigade, deploying and maintaining a presence in volatile areas, ensuring the protection of civilians and UN staff; Monitoring ceasefire agreements and cross-border movements of military forces and arms; facilitating humanitarian assistance and the return of refugees, assisting with protection and promotion of human rights, Coordinating mine removal activities and Supporting a national dialogue and promoting the political process.

But, in tracing the UN’s peace keeping force in Eastern Congo for the past 13 years, I came across the contradicting reality. While the UN sees the mission as a success a story, the Congolese people, and regional leaders see the Mission as another failure or replica of what really transpired in Rwanda in
1994 when the Hutus extremists butchered the minority Tutsi as the UN force led by Romeo Delaire watched helplessly. Between 1999 and 2012, when the UN’s peace keeping force was deployed in DRC, an estimated 5.4 million people died from war-related causes making the Congo conflict the world’s deadliest since the end of WWII.

Not only that but also according to details gathered during our investigation about 415,000 women are raped yearly, meaning an average of 48 women are raped every hour during that period, according to a study conducted by American Journal of Public Health.

During that period, rebel factions have continued to re-group and re-emerge, with the latest M23, which is replica of CNDP, causing humanitarian disaster in Congo after the group captured Goma dramatically in November 2012 with about 8000 troops, defeating a 20,000-force of the Congolese national army backed by UN forces.

Alarmed by the failure of the peace keeping mission President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, while attending the SADC meeting in Dar es Salaam few weeks after M23 captured Goma termed the UN’s forces “a bunch of tourists”.

“If UN’s mission was working effectively, there wouldn’t have been needs to have intervention Brigade…the Congolese are suffering and that’s why we need to deploy the neutral forces.” Tanzania’s Foreign affairs Minister, Bernad Membe, later told journalists in Dar es Salaam on the day Museveni termed the mission a bunch of tourists.

The UN peace keeping mission, which, some regional leaders say is impotent in the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, costs $1.4 billion a year – which means that for the past 12 years, it has a whopping $16.8 billion, making it the second most expensive mission in the world.

According to our investigation, the most expensive UN peace keeping force is stationed in Darfur, which annually spends between $1.5 and $1.8 billion.

During my stay in Goma in December, last year few days after the withdrawal of M23 rebels who dramatically capture the city, -- I saw devastated faces, homes, infrastructure and above all the legacy of guns, bullets and bombs.

As the two sides, the M23 rebels believed to be backed by Rwanda and Congolese national army, FARDC, fought a fierce battle to control the soul of Goma, killings, rapes and looting clouded the city with civilians paying heavy price.

The results of the fierce battle was M23 capturing Goma, a provincial capital with a population of one million people on November 20, last year, forcing more than 140,000 people to flee their homes, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees(UNHCR). This number is on top of those already forced from their homes by previous rounds of fighting in the region.

For the people of Goma, who have witnessed wars for the past 19 years, the invasion by M23 was a reminder that better tomorrow was still a day dream, though the streets of this city were still manned by armed UN soldiers in armoured vehicles.

With the city being under 18,000 UN forces being supported by another 5000 supporting staff, and over 20,000 government forces, residents here were still under siege, a situation that has continued till to date.

“We have known no peace since 1994 when the rebellion against Mobutu regime started here. Our life has been on and off, running from one place to another to seek a refuge, while counting the losses of people and property. We thought UN peacekeepers would make us safe, but things are just worsening every year.

“It was bombing with bullets raining in every corner as Tutsi rebels battled our army. I and my family were scared. I thought I wasn’t going to survive this war.” James Mukakizima, a 54 year old, and a father of five who lives in Goma said in broken Swahili with Congolese accent.

The sudden rise of M23 and its dramatic capture of the city of Goma in November, 2012 exposed vulnerability of millions of Congolese the war-torn central African nation, which has witnessed wars for the past two decades, despite the presence of the heavily funded UN peacekeepers.

According to details and testimonies gathered during our investigation in Goma, the aftermath of M23 invasion was hundreds deaths, 140,000 refugees and several hundred women raped by both rebels and government forces.

During the invasion, the UN says over 200 women were raped including 72 rapes committed in the Minova area, about 60 kilometres.

“I was raped in front of MONUSCO (UN peacekeepers) … three soldiers from the government forces raped me frequently until I fainted. They raped me because they thought I am Tutsi,” Esther, a 34 year old and mother of three, told me in Goma.

According to eye witnesses, when the Congolese national army, FARDC, was defeated by the M23 rebels, their revenge was for innocent civilian like Esther who paid the price because of her ethnic background. This is because most of the rebels who form the M23 are Tutsi. As Congolese soldiers withdrew from the frontline after being overpowered by the rebels, some targeted those they considered M23 sympathizers especially women.

The UN’s cable obtained during our investigation filed in New York on November 27, after M23 rebels captured Goma, seizing a satellite town 26 miles (40km) to the west, says the Congolese army that had mounted a surprise counterattack, which failed, raped women during their retreat to Minova.

Following the defeat, thousands of Congolese national soldiers retreated to Minova, around 50km from Goma, but on the eve of their retreat they raped women, the UN cable says.
They usually drunk, angry, paranoid and intent on demanding money and cigarettes from villagers they meet on their way, the Congolese soldiers are accused of raping about 70 women in Minova alone in one day, the UN cable further says.

Esther is among those who were raped during the retreat of Congolese soldiers and she joins five million women who have been raped in Congo by government and rebel forces during the past 12 years, which the UN has deployed the second most expensive peace keeping force dubbed by some African leaders, "a bunch of tourists".

But, Esther like many Congolese from the war-torn region feels betrayed by the UN forces.

**Trailing the cost of military adventure in Congo**

According to the UN’s budget copies obtained during our investigation there are 23,407 personnel deployed in the Eastern Congo whereby 18,884 are soldiers, military observers and police while supporting staff are 3,941.

Together, these men and women, dispatched in Congo to restore peace cost the UN an estimated $1.370 billion annually, making this mission the second most expensive.

This cost according to the resolution 1279 passed by the UN’s Security Council, was among other things supposed to rescue Congo from the warlords, but nearly fourteen years, the mission has failed to bring peace in the war-torn nation.

Since its inception, the peace keeping mission in Congo has cost the UN about $16.8 billion.

For instance during the financial year of 2010/11, a total of $1,369,000,000 was allocated to the MONUSCO whereby $821,324,900 or 60 percent of the total budget paid salaries, according to the documents in our possession.

Our investigation established that 40 percent of the yearly budget allocated for MONUSCO is spent on food, medical, logistics and transport, communication and other suppliers whereby air transport, facilities and infrastructure takes almost half of this money.

During the previous year(2009/2010), a total of $1,351,538,500 was allocated for the Mission in Eastern Congo whereby $814,476,600 or 60 percent of the total budget paid salaries, according to the documents in our possession.

The rest of the money amounting to $537,061,900 was spent on infrastructure and facilities, transport both ground and air, medical, foods, information technology and communication, and other supplies, which are not stated clearly in every budget though it costs an average of $23 million a year.

According to our investigation in 2012/13, the peacekeepers were allocated a total of $1,347,538,800, in which $826,005,000 or 61.3 percent paid salaries, while the rest was spent on key services like medical, communication, transport, infrastructure and facilities, information technology, foods and other supplies.

In average in 2010/11 every personnel in the expensive peace mission in Eastern Congo was allocated $58,486, which is 254 times the per capital income of single Congolese. According to our investigation, $35,088 was spent on salary per every personnel, while another $23,398 went on operational cost like medical, communication, transport etc per person.

With a population of about 75 million people and a Gross Domestic Product of $25 billion, an average earning for a single Congolese or per capital income is about $330, according to a report by International Monetary Fund released in 2012.

But in terms of natural resources, according to a report by the world’s respected business and economic affairs magazine, Forbes, The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a vast country rich in natural resources, with an estimated $24 trillion worth of untapped deposits of raw mineral ores, including the world’s largest reserves of cobalt and significant quantities of the world’s diamonds, gold and copper. This amount is more than the Gross Domestic Product of the entire European Union, which in 2012 was $16.66 trillion, but still DRC is the poorest country in the world.

“For many years, the DRC has suffered from extreme poverty pitted against extreme wealth.” Reported Forbes Magazine, though it failed to state how the western countries created former Dictator Mobutu and blessed is looting of the Congolese resources for decades.

In its 2013 Human Development Report, the United Nations Development Programme ranked the DRC 186 on the Human Development Index, bottom out of 187 countries for which it has sufficient data. Public services - from education and health to water, sanitation and transport - are in an extremely poor state, and more than 87 percent of the population lives on less than US$1.25 per day.

According to budget documents we obtained during our investigation, The $16.8 billion which has so far been doled out to bankroll the peace keepers, is equal to 67.2 percent of the country’s Gross Domestic Product, whereby the annual cost is equivalent to about 20 percent of the Congo’s annual budget, which in 2012, was $8 billion according to the DRC’s budget report obtained during our investigation.

But as Rwandan President Paul Kagame put it in May, this year, “You have a UN peacekeeping mission in Congo spending $1.5bn every year for the past 12 years. Nobody ever asks: what do we get out of this?”

Depending on who you ask, the actual figure spent by the force varies but, according to budget documents in our possession, the actual UN’s budget for the Congo’s peacekeepers is between $1.37 and $1.4 billion a year.

Kagame, the man accused by the UN’s group of experts of initiating the Congo’s second war as well as current crisis, further says, “From the best arithmetic,
What the billions could have done in DRC

According to our own analysis of how much has been spent by the international communities in financing what President Museveni described in Dar es Salaam as “a bunch of tourists” in the DRC, and the investments on return, which the Congolese and the world has received during the 4392 days, the $16.8 billion would have done better if invested in the Congolese lives.

Think about this; the monthly bill for salaries and maintaining the UN peace keeping forces in the DRC stands at $112 million, equivalent to $3,754 million a day -- for the past 4,392 days.

This monies come from the biggest contributors of the UN peace keeping mission, with United States alone contributing about 30 percent of the total mission worldwide yearly, according to documents from UN headquarters obtained during our investigation.

The details obtained during our investigation further state that in its resolution 55/235 of 23 December 2000, the General Assembly reaffirmed the general principles underlying the financing of peacekeeping operations, whereby it state the financing of such operations is the collective responsibility of all States Members of the United Nations and, accordingly, the costs of peacekeeping operations are expenses of the Organization to be borne by Member States in accordance with Article 17, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations.

To put things into perspective, this amount of money could quite easily construct 6,250 classrooms every month, meaning there would be 75,000 classrooms every year (for the East African standard), enough to accommodate 3,750,000 students. Within three years, there would be 11,250,000 students in modern schools (both secondary and primary) in the Democratic Republic of Congo at the cost of $4 billion which was spent on bankrolling UN peace keeping missions during the first three years between 2001-2003.

Using the same East African standards in our analysis we established that at the cost of $1 million for a single dispensary or health centre, the DRC would have 1,500 modern health centres within a year at the cost of $1.4 billion now spent on United Nations peace keeping missions in the DRC. According to our own analysis, DRC would have also constructed the modern airports in Goma, Lubumbashi, and Kinshasa at the roughly cost of $300 million— with Kinshasa airport alone costing the big chunk of $200 million out of this budget.

The two projects would also link the major parts of the country not served by water transport, and the main centres of the economy. Loan repayments would come from concessions for raw materials which China desperately needs: copper, cobalt, gold and nickel, as well as by toll revenues from the road and railway.

According to World Bank details, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has fewer all-weather paved highways than any country of its population and size in Africa — a total of 2250km, of which only 1226 km is in good condition. To put this in perspective, the road distance across the country in any direction is more than 2500 km (e.g. Matadi to Lubumbashi, 2700 km by road).

The figure of 2250 km converts to 35 km of paved road per 1,000,000 of population. Comparative figures for Zambia and Botswana are 721 km and 3427 km respectively, according to the World Bank.

The $8.4 billion spent by UN peace keeping mission between 2001 and 2006, would have constructed over 3000 kilometres of tarmac roads, build a new railways network, establish hundreds of health centres and schools.

For instance according to our analysis, DRC would have constructed a total of 1,153 km railways line at the cost of $1.3 million per kilometer. According to WB details, Angola in 2010 constructed 470km from Luanda to Malanje at the cost of $1.28 million per kilometer. The $1.37 billion spent by UN peace keeping mission in 2001-2006, could have doubled 1,153 km railways line, or have constructed 2600 km in explosives and railway.

To put things into perspective, the $1.37 billion bill bankrolling the second most expensive peace mission in the world a year would have enabled Congolese to have 1153 kilometer of modern railways. In the eighth year, the railways network would have doubled, reaching 2,307km, the longest in Sub Saharan Africa just by spending another $1.37 billion in constructions.

In the ninth year, DRC would have secured 5 modern ferries with the capacity to carry 1000 passengers and 50 100 tonnes of cargo each, at the cost of $250 million, making the country’s marine transport the best in the Central and Eastern African region. DRC would have also constructed the modern airports in Goma, Lubumbashi, and Kinshasa at the roughly cost of $300 million—with Kinshasa airport alone costing the big chunk of $200 million out of this budget.
To make the long story short, the $16.8 billion used to bankroll the UN’s second most expensive army in the world stationed in Congo would have turned the central African nation into the giant of Africa in terms of modern infrastructure, health and education. But, after 12 years of ‘military adventure’ in Congo at the cost of $16.8 billion or two times the Tanzanian national budget, Congo is still clouded in massive poverty, insecurity, corruption and massive looting of its resources.

Above all, peace, which the MONUSCO claims to restore, has remained elusive in Eastern Congo.

The result is the mushrooming of rebel factions, which claim to be motivated by poor living or economic and social conditions in DRC. During our investigation we established that though majority of these rebel factions claim to fight for the liberation of Congo, most of them are located in the mineral rich areas in Eastern Congo.

While the M23 rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo have dominated headlines in recent months, more than 25 rebel factions operate in just two provinces of eastern DR Congo: North and South Kivu. They have shifting alliances and control fluid areas of territory - but try to hang on to profitable tin or gold mines and/or routes where travellers can be “taxed”, according to a report released by UK’s aid group, Oxfam.

Other rebel factions based in North and South Kivu provinces are the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a Rwandan Hutu rebels group that claims to defend the Hutus, who fled to DR Congo after the Rwandan genocide in 1994. But most observers say a number of its members come from the former Army for the Liberation of Rwanda, which took part in the massacre of Tutsis, Mai Mai militias, which refers not to a specific political movement but to a broad range of armed groups active in the provinces of North and South Kivu, the Lord’s Rebel Army (LRA) founded by Joseph Kony in the late 1980s in northern Uganda, with the goal of establishing a Christian theocracy based on the Ten Commandments.

Other are the Patriotic Forces for the Liberation of Congo, which is the arm branch of the Union of Congolese Patriots political party that has been accused of numerous abuses of human rights in the mineral-rich province of Ituri, in northeastern DR Congo, where it was involved in ethnic warfare from the early 2000s, Patriotic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (FPLC), Allied Democratic Forces/National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF/NALU), and Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri/Popular Front for Justice in Congo (FRPI/FPJC).

One UN official told me in Goma, “The war is business…a huge business. If you talk about our $1.37 billion budget, nearly half of this money goes to international suppliers in US and Europe.”

“You have arms suppliers; you have suppliers of all required expenditures for thousands of soldiers but have you ever asked yourself who these suppliers are” an official from the office of the UN Secretary General Representative Office (SGRO) in Congo who declined to be named told me.

“There are some of us who would like to see this situation continues so that we can benefit from the windfall of war…and there are those who are using this situation to make billions through plunder of Congo’s natural resources but unfortunately it’s Rwanda that features a lot.”

No one mentions China, Europe, American, Canada and South African companies which control the vast resources in the DRC through dubious contract, which to my views exploits the country heavily.” The UN official further says.

“Just where we are FDLR (Forums for Democratic Forces Liberation of Rwanda) has been making millions of dollars during the past decade, making it perhaps the richest rebel faction in this region…not to mention other factions like M23, which control timber and mining businesses as well as taxing locals in order to finance its operation.” He further tells me.

The claims by the UN official is corroborated by the military head of M23 General Makenga who told me during an exclusive interview in his stronghold outside Goma that “the rebel faction raises money through timber, mining and taxing locals” to fund the ‘liberation army.’

These claims are also confirmed by the UN’s group of experts reports of 2009, 2010 and 2011.

According to a report by the UN Group of Experts of December 2009, the use of gold by armed groups has become markedly accentuated in the last few years due to the ease with which it can be smuggled, although this is difficult to quantify given that government mining documents from North Kivu and South Kivu show only a few kilograms of gold exported officially each year. The group of experts is a team picked by the UN’s Secretary General to function as an independent inquiry panel assessing the situation in war-torn countries.

The DRC senate report – also published in September 2009 – estimated that 40 tons, or $1.24 billion of gold, nearly the same amount the UN military adventure costs yearly, is smuggled out of the country each year.

The UN report, thoroughly reviewed during my investigation, confirms that armed groups, in particular the FDLR, earn close to $50 million of revenues each year from the trade which therefore represents one of the most significant avenues of their direct financing. FDLR use part of this money to bankroll its military operations in Eastern Congo.

The UN Group of Experts traced in 2009 the flow of gold from sites exploited and taxed by the FDLR and other militia, and demonstrates in this section that significant amounts of gold are being trafficked through the region, particularly through Uganda and Burundi, and eventually sold in the United Arab Emirates. The Group demonstrates that the networks in Uganda and Burundi are inter-related and both have commercial ties to individuals operating in the UAE. FDLR is not alone in this business because in DRC there are dozens more rebel factions that have taken
the advantage of insecurity to plunder the country’s vast minerals resources under the umbrella of liberation struggle, according to documented evidences from United Nations and other international humanitarian groups.

**What was the Return On Investment to the UN?**

For the past 12 years, during which the UN has invested $16.8 billion on its ‘bunch of tourists’, the return on investments has been 5.4 million people dead from war-related causes.

According to a 2008 report by the International Rescue Committee, an estimated 5,400,000 people have died from war-related causes in Congo since 1998 – the world’s deadliest documented conflict since WW II.

The vast majority died from non-violent causes such as malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia and malnutrition – easily preventable and treatable conditions when people have access to health care and nutritious food. About 48 women are raped in the Democratic Republic of the Congo every hour, a study by American Journal of Public Health found. This means that 414,720 women were raped in DRC yearly during the past decade when the war rocked the central African nation.

The study, published in June 2011, found sexual abuse was rampant not only in conflict areas but also in homes, with nearly one woman subjected to some form of sexual abuse every minute.

The DRC has been rocked by war, with rapes widely documented in the conflict-hit east of the country. However, the study suggests the problem is bigger and more pervasive than previously thought, and goes further in documenting domestic sexual abuse.

It found 1,152 women are raped every day – a rate equal to 48 per hour. That rate is 26 times more than the previous estimate of 16,000 rapes reported in one year by the United Nations.

The study, carried out by three public health researchers from the International Food Policy Research Institute at Stony Brook University in New York, and the World Bank, was partly financed by the US government and based on figures from a nationwide household survey of 3,436 Congolese women aged 15 to 49 in 2007.

Michelle Hindin, an associate professor at Johns Hopkins’ Bloomberg School of Public Health who specializes in gender-based violence, in her study backed with shocking data named Congo the worst place to be a woman.

The UN didn’t dispute the findings by Professor Michelle Hindin since the study was released in May 2011. According to details obtained during our investigation, as the UN bankrolled its peace keeping forces at $3,754 million a day, there were 1,152 women being raped every day – the highest cost of return on investment made by the UN in war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo.

After 12 years of UN’s peace keeping mission in then Congo, which costs $16.8 billion, 4,976,640 women (roughly five million women) have been raped in the Central African nation – the second most expensive mission in the world after Darfur. Some were raped by the very UN soldiers as well as Congolese national soldiers who were supposed to protect them against rowdy rebels.

We couldn’t independently verify this figure as there were conflicting data on the actual number of women raped during the past twelve years in which MONUSCO has been in Eastern Congo.

At the cost of $16.8 billion investment in peace keeping mission, the Congolese harvested 5.4 million deaths, hundreds of thousands raped, plunder of the country’s gold amounting to $15 billion during the period according to the DRC senate and UN reports of 2009. This is not to mention refugees who have fled their homes to avoid being caught up in the deadly wars.

“They are making up these rubbish allegations because on the ground in the eastern DRC there is the biggest number of UN peacekeeping operations in the whole world with the largest budget in the whole world, and [yet] they have failed to do anything in the past five to ten years…They are blaming their shortcomings on Uganda and Rwanda. They should get on with their job of what they are there to do in the eastern DRC instead of blaming others,” Ugandan State Minister for Foreign Affairs Okello Oryem, reacting to the UN’s group of experts report on October 17, 2012 after Uganda was accused of supporting M23 rebels.

Joseph Rwagatare, a Kigali based commentator wrote on August 6, this year, “No amount of money, no number of troops however well-supplied with sophisticated weapons, including drones, will fix the security and political problems in DRC… the United Nations Mission in Congo (MONUC) set up in 1999 and its successor, the UN Stabilisation Mission in Congo (MONUSCO) and now the Intervention Brigade only add to the insecurity; they don’t end it.

Congo itself, wrote Rwagatare, is a classic example of UN failure from the 1960s to the present.

**From hope to hell ...**

In the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, nearly 1.5 million Rwandans fled across the border and settled in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The majority of refugees were civilians, but Hutu militiamen responsible for the genocide also fled to the DRC fearing reprisals from Tutsi dominated Rwandese Patriotic Front.

When reports emerged that former DRC Dictator Mobutu Seko Seko, had allowed Hutu militias to rearm in eastern Congo, the Rwandan government threw its support behind Congolese rebel leader, Laurent Kabila, who was attempting to oust the dictator. What followed was dubbed by international observers as, “African World War, in which eight nations participated in the five-year fight that claimed the lives of over five million people through conflict and diseases.
In 1999, alarmed by bloody war in the war-torn Congo, inside the Norwegian Room located at the UN’s headquarters in New York, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1279 establishing the Peacekeeping Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo known by its French acronym, MONUC. With fresh memory of the failure of UN’s force in Rwanda in 1994 Genocide in which about 800,000 people were killed, the 15-members of the Security Council adopted the resolution to rescue DRC from becoming another human’ abattoirs.

The Security Council members among others include veto-wielding China, France, Russia, United States of America, United Kingdom. These countries are based on the powers that they were the winners of the WWII. But there are also 10 non-permanent members, with five elected each year to serve two-year terms, according to the Chapter V of the UN charter.

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) oversees the second largest deployed military force in the world, with over 120,000 military, police, and civilian personnel from 119 countries currently serving in 16 missions and one special political mission on four continents. While the United States authorizes and in many cases advocates for new missions, it provides few personnel to the operations and other UN Member States cover nearly three-quarters of their costs, the report further says.

As a permanent, veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council, the United States authorizes every UN peacekeeping mission and contributes one quarter of its costs. For more than 64 years, the United States has provided critical resources and training for missions and worked with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to create every mandate, says UN report posted on website which promote the mission worldwide.

While decisions about establishing, maintaining or expanding a peacekeeping operation are taken by the Security Council, the financing of UN Peacekeeping operations is the collective responsibility of all UN Member States, a statement from UN headquarters says.

"Whereas the economically more developed countries are in a position to make relatively larger contributions to peacekeeping operations, the economically less developed countries have a relatively limited capacity to contribute towards peacekeeping operations involving heavy expenditures" UN says adding,

"The special responsibilities of the permanent members of the Security Council for the maintenance of peace and security should be borne in mind in connection with their contributions to the financing of peace and security operations"

Data obtained from UN headquarters show that the top 10 financiers Peacekeeping operations in 2013 and their amounts in brackets are United States (28.38%), Japan (10.83%), France (7.22%), Germany (7.14%), United Kingdom (6.68%), China (6.64%), Italy (4.45%), Russian Federation (3.15%), Canada (2.98%) and Spain (2.97%).

Among the Mission’s mandate in eastern Congo was neutralizing armed groups through an Intervention Brigade (introduced last year to accommodate SADC forces), helping to establish a Rapid Reaction Force within the Congolese national army (FARDC), tasked with eventually taking over the responsibilities of the Intervention Brigade, deploying and maintaining a presence in volatile areas, ensuring the protection of civilians and UN staff; Monitoring ceasefire agreements and cross-border movements of military forces and arms; facilitating humanitarian assistance and the return of refugees, assisting with protection and promotion of human rights, Coordinating mine removal activities and Supporting a national dialogue and promoting the political process.

Others were supporting the government of the DRC in reforming the security sector, contributing to the security of Congolese institutions and protecting officials, helping the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants; Advising on essential legislation, including a constitution and laws dealing with the electoral process and security sector reform, Coordinating operations with the FARDC against armed groups; training and mentoring the FARDC in human rights and humanitarian law in order to bolster security sector reform efforts and actively seeking to hold accountable those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity through the cooperation of the International Criminal Court.

According to details gathered from UN’s headquarters, since resolution 1279 was adopted, the Mission’s mandate has been amended fifth times in a bid aimed at making it curb the fragile situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

For instance in 2000, the Security Council expanded the mission’s mandate by adopting resolution 1291, which tasked peacekeepers with overseeing the Luaka Ceasefire Agreement of 1999.

In 2004, the UN expanded the Mission’s mandate again by including Chapter VII of the UN Charter, in order to enable peace keeping force to use force to protect civilians. But, again, in May 2010, resolution 1925 marked a new phase for the mission by changing the name to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO).

In 2011, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1991 which demanded that all armed groups cease all forms of violence and violation of human rights. As if this wasn’t enough in June 2012, the Security Council renewed MONUSCO’s mandate by adopting resolution 2053, which emphasized security reform, consolidation of State authority and the eradication of violence in the eastern provinces.

Following the September 2012 International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), in which African Union and United Nations decided to immediately establish a 3000-strong neutral international force in an effort to bring stability to the region, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2098 in March, this year, authorizing an Intervention Brigade and extending the mission’s mandate until March 31, 2014.
How the scramble for Congo’s resources and politics of betrayal shaped Africa’s war-torn nation for decades

At the busiest streets of Dar es Salaam, a home to nearly 5 million people, if someone shouts in Swahili, “Mwizi, Mwizi, Mwizi” meaning you are a thief, within a blink of an eye you would be a dead man.

You will be stoned by everyone around you, and finally, the attackers set you ablaze after pouring petrol on your body. Law enforcers call it mob justice, which is a system often seen as resulting from the failures of the justice system. The lack of access to justice and the population’s mistrust in the judiciary leads to a sense of impunity.

But in the same country, those who commit the biggest crimes like corruption that impact the country economically, politically and socially, walk free on the streets of Dar es Salaam and some are even praised for using their positions in government wisely to make themselves rich.

The story of the plunder of Congo’s resources often follows the path of mob justice in Tanzania or Haiti. According to various reports produced by local and international organizations in the past decade Rwanda and Uganda can’t avoid blame for the plunder of the Congolese resources since early 2001, when the news first broke out.

Various reports by some reputable international organizations have accused Rwanda and Uganda of plundering or directly benefitting from the plundered resources in Congo.

The illegal minerals stolen from Congo have been exported through Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania. For instance according to a report by Amnesty International released in July, this year, Uganda which doesn’t mine gold in 2003, exported an estimated $60 million worth of Congolese gold, much of it destined for Switzerland.

One of the companies buying gold from Uganda is Metalor Technologies, a leading Swiss refinery. The chain of Congolesemiddlemen, Ugandan traders, and multinational corporations forms an important funding network for armed groups operating in northeastern Congo.

Metalor knew, or should have known, says Amnesty International, that gold bought from its suppliers in Uganda came from a conflict zone in northeastern DRC where human rights were abused on a systematic basis.

The 2009 report by the UN Group of Experts found that the use of gold by armed groups has become markedly accentuated in the last few years due to the ease with which it can be smuggled, although this is difficult to quantify given that government mining documents from North Kivu and South Kivu show only a few kilograms of gold exported officially each year. The group of experts is a team picked by the UN’s Secretary General to function as an independent inquiry panel assessing the situation in war-torn countries.

The DRC senate report – also published in September 2009 – estimated that 40 tons, or $ 1.24 billion of gold, which close to amount the ‘UN military adventure’ costs yearly, is smuggled out of the country each year.

The UN report, thoroughly reviewed during my investigation, confirms that armed groups, in particular the FDLR, earn close to $50 million of revenues each year from the trade which therefore represents one of the most significant avenues of their direct financing. FDLR use part of this money to bankroll its military operations in Eastern Congo.

In November 2010, the UN’s group of experts revealed how the Congolese national army and rebels were making millions of dollars in illegal mining business at Bisie Mine in Eastern Congo, estimating that the annual earnings was $29 million.
The masterminds of this illegal business were ex-CNDP soldiers led by Ntaganda who had earlier been integrated in the Congolese national army following the March 23, Nairobi peace agreement. The report also named General Hamisi Gabriel Kumba of being the ringleader of this illegal network.

As the regional and international pressure continued on ‘blood minerals’ in Congo, calling for more sanctions on those involved in conflict minerals, rebel factions discovered the new source of revenues: the plunder of forest to produce charcoal and timbers.

During my brief stay at M23 stronghold at Rumangabo just few kilometers outside Goma town, I came across dozens of trucks carrying charcoals and timbers, which were produced in the rebel's controlled area.

For instance M23 has a special battalion that monitors the charcoal and timber business and collect revenues from traders.

In 2010, the UN group of experts estimated that charcoal trade in Goma town was a business valued at $28 million annually. In Goma, a sack of charcoal weighing about 90kg is sold at $25 at retail price.

“Local environmental NGOs informed the Group that charcoal from the park constituted at least 80 per cent of the Goma market, representing a total value of around $28 million annually. As charcoal made from the hardwood found in the park has a longer burn capacity, its value is much higher than that of charcoal made from eucalyptus trees,” a report by group of experts issued in 2010 says.

The biggest casualty in this man made environmental disaster inside Congo is Virunga national park, where rebels as well as the Congolese national army soldiers have been competing for the lucrative charcoal trade valued at $28 million.

During our investigation, we established that most of the rebel factions claiming to fight the Kinshasa regime operate about 4000km from Congo’s capital city, and are all in minerals-rich areas.

To fund their rebellion, these rebel factions plunder Congo’s natural resources mainly minerals, timbers, and charcoals.

In July, this year, Global Witness’ in its fresh investigation in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) revealed high-level military involvement in the region’s minerals trade, in which the key findings are:

• Tonnes of gold produced in eastern Congo benefit rebels and high-ranking members of the Congolese and Burundian state armies. The gold is laundered through Burundi’s domestic gold sector and exported to Dubai.

• Neither local buyers in the Great Lakes region nor international traders conduct adequate checks on the gold they purchase to ensure that it has not funded conflict or human rights abuses in eastern Congo.

• Efforts to establish conflict-free supply chains in the tin and tantalum trade are progressing. The first international project attempting to source conflict-free tin from a conflict area in eastern Congo was launched in October 2012.

• Much of the tin, tantalum and tungsten produced in North and South Kivu benefits rebels and members of the state army. The minerals are smuggled out of Congo into Rwanda and Burundi for export. Tin and tantalum smuggled into Rwanda is laundered through the country’s domestic tagging system and exported as ‘clean’ Rwandan material.

“Eastern Congo’s lucrative trade in tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold has been controlled by abusive armed groups and factions of the national army for almost fifteen years...These groups use the profits generated from the minerals trade to fund their fight.” Says Global Witness, adding

“The local populations in North and South Kivu have borne the brunt of a prolonged conflict characterised by murder, pillage, mass rape and displacement.”

But, apart from rebels’ plunder of Congo’s resources, there are also multinationals stealing from Congolese in the name of ‘investments through sham contracts. Our investigation, supported by various studied conducted by both local and international researchers and activists, established that among the means used to plunder Congo’s resources include tax evasion, bogus contracts and web of offshore companies.

The International Monetary Fund has estimated that in 2009 the value of the DRC’s mineral exports were USD 4.2 billion but the taxes collected by the Congolese government the same year were estimated at USD 155 million – less than four percent of the minerals’ value.

In his report titled, “Economic Crimes in Congo”, published on July 24, 2012, James North argues that if the Congolese people can force the multinational mining giants to pay their government fairly, this country has a chance.

During the era of both Kabillas, the country has entered into controversial deals, which bleed Congo dearly, leaving the world’s second poorest nation in the chains of massive poverty.

In his report, for instance, James North says, in 2007, the American mining multinational Freeport-McMoRan gained control of the copper and cobalt mine outside Katanga town, which is known locally as Tenke Fungurume Mining (TFM). Freeport invested $2 billion to start the mine up again, which is the largest single foreign investment in the entire country.

“The irony is that Freeport is grudgingly recognized here as the least bad of the international enterprises that are reviving the mining industry in Katanga. The company is starting to disclose publicly how much it has paid in taxes to the government...Last year Freeport announced that since 2006, its tax bill was $370 million. So far, the other mining companies have not done the same.” North says
But, the question is where's the money?

Perhaps last year’s developments some seventy-five miles west of Katanga in another mining town, Kolwezi, offer the clue on the inside story of massive corruption in Congo.

A British Member of Parliament, Eric Joyce, revealed suspicious details as ownership in two Kolwezi mines changed hands in secret deals.

Eric, chair of the UK Parliament Great Lakes of Africa Group, said documents passed to him “confirm for the first time that elements of the DRC Government, in particular the current President, Joseph Kabila, has sold vast mining assets at knock down prices to various off-shore ‘shell’ companies.”

In his statement issued in November, 2011, Eric said, “This powerful evidence proves that the natural resources of the Congo are not being used as a legitimate source of revenue for the people. Instead, a series of complex arrangements between their own government and various BVI shell companies means that a few are enriched at the terrible cost of the many.

“The UK government alone will contribute $1billion in aid in the next 4 years. At a time of austerity at home we must be certain this is money well spent. This evidence shows that UK tax payers’ money is being poured into a country where billions in tax revenue and mineral assets are being diverted from the people.” He said

According to available details, roughly 45 incorporated British Virgin Island(BVI) shell companies between 2008 and 2011 acquired assets in the DRC, nine of which were identified in the documents released by UK Member of Parliament.

“These transactions were not disclosed by the DRC government. None of these asset sales were put to public tender. None of the BVI companies have any known track-record of expertise in the mining or resource sectors. None of the owners of these BVI companies have been made public by the DRC government.” The UK MP said.

But, available details show that most of these shell companies appear to be connected to Israeli businessman Dan Gertler.

Based on fair-market valuations of the assets sold, the total loss to the DRC people, in lost monies and lost assets is more than US$5.5billion.

This amount is over 60 percent of the Congo’s national budget for 2012. It’s ten times what the donors gave Congo in 2011 to finance its disputed election.

After these state or expropriated assets are acquired at well below market value by the BVI companies, they are then sold, in part or outright, to multi-national firms, some of which are listed on the London Stock Exchange. In the process, the BVI companies realize vast windfall profits for their owners, all of whom are cloaked in anonymity.

For instance documents obtained during our inves-
he's built up a net worth of at least $2.5 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

Gertler's love affair with Congo began in 1997, when the country was one of the top five producers of diamonds in the world. In May, 1997, insurgents led by Laurent Kabila backed by Rwanda and Uganda, overthrew the 32-year old corrupt regime of Mobutu SeseSeko, a U.S. ally who had ruled for 32 years. After taking Kinshasa on May 17, Laurent Kabila declared himself president and renamed the country Democratic Republic of Congo.

According to a report published by Bloomberg Magazine in December last year, Gertler's friendship with President Kabila's son, Joseph who was the Chief of Defence Forces, was coordinated by Shlomo Bentalia, Chief Rabbi of Kinshasa's Chabad-Lubavitch.

The first meeting between the two, took place at Intercontinental Hotel, the only plush hotel that was available in Kinshasa in those days in which movers and shakers of Congo's affairs used to rub shoulders.

Kabila asked for $20 million in cash, Gertler says. Gertler agreed. A few days later, he was back in Israel, still celebrating the deal, when the desperate Congolese president called, demanding the money immediately.

At 8 a.m., Gertler called Union Bank of Israel Ltd., where he successfully put his grandfather's teachings on building bankers’ trust to the test. Using a combination of bank credit, inheritance, cash reserves and liquidated stocks, Gertler scraped together the payment and sent it to the Swiss account of Congo's central bank, he says. Gertler had bet his fortune on a president at war.

This is how the Jewish billionaire bought Congo's vast diamond. At $20 million bailout to the Congolese President, he clinched a lucrative deal, which has made him one of the richest persons on earth.

As the Congolese struggle with massive poverty, the Jewish billionaire wants to be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for his deals in DRC.

"I should get a Nobel Prize...They need people like us, who come and put billions in the ground. Without this, the resources are worth nothing." Gertler was quoted by Bloomberg Magazine.

In 2010, in return for canceling some $12 billion in its foreign debt, the government said it would stop the secret mining deals. The international community continues to have strong potential leverage.

In 2011, international community spent up to $500 million to fund disputed elections, and World Bank loans are financing road repairs and other projects in Katanga and elsewhere.

Over 50 percent of DRC's annual budget is aid from overseas, while at the same time, as we established in our investigation, the UN spends an average $1.4 billion a year to fund a failed peace mission, which some Great Lakes region leaders have termed, "a bunch of tourists".

"An International Monetary Fund delegation visited the DR Congo in June, and the secret mine deals were on the agenda, because they almost certainly violate the conditions attached to an existing $561 million IMF loan...But the international financial institutions have long lived by a double standard. Over the years, as a condition for financial bailouts, they have not hesitated to order poor countries to cut back education budgets, or to charge poor people "user fees" to visit health clinics.

But the IMF and the World Bank have been less exacting when it comes to the powerful, whether the local elite or international companies. More than likely, the Kabila government will call the international community’s bluff, and the mega corruption will continue." North writes on his report.

The 2013 Human Development Report ranked the DRC 186 on the Human Development Index, bottom out of 187 countries for which it has sufficient data. Public services - from education and health to water, sanitation and transport - are in an extremely poor state, and more than 87 per cent of the population lives on less than US$1.25 per day.

According to budget documents we obtained during our investigation, the amount spent in financing the UN forces in Eastern Congo between 2000 and 2013 is estimated at $16.8 billion, which is equal to 67.2 percent of the country’s Gross Domestic Product.

What UN’s peacekeepers cost yearly is equivalent to about 20 percent of the Congo’s annual budget, which in 2012, was $8 billion according to the DRC’s budget report obtained during our investigation.

Gertler is just one of the many traders and brokers who have made a killing in the post Mobutu Congo, through deals, which have caused an outcry from both local and international analysts who closely follow what is taking place in Africa’s rich nation in terms of resources, but remain the second poorest on earth in 186 countries surveyed last year.

The dragon quietly in Congo

China began in the early 1990s to assign a small number of personnel to United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa; the numbers increased significantly in 2001 when China sent more than 200 troops to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

In 2007, a Chinese general for the first time took command of a UN peacekeeping operation—in the Western Sahara. At the end of April, China had more than 1,600 troops, police and observers assigned to six of the seven UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. The largest Chinese units were in Liberia, southern Sudan, Darfur and the DRC. About 75 percent of all Chinese peacekeepers serve in Africa.

According to David H. Shinn, Adjunct Professor, Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University, there are three explanations for China’s involvement in peacekeeping. First, it contributes to peace and security and helps China to project an image that it is supporting the building of a “harmonious society” to balance western influence.
Second, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) wants to expand its experience in non-combat missions such as peacekeeping.

Third, the PLA and Chinese security forces can learn important lessons that may improve their responsiveness, riot-control capabilities, coordination of military emergency command systems and ability to conduct non-combat missions at home.

But, behind this move, lies China’s lust to take over control of Africa’s vast natural resources without firing a single bullet as one Chinese General once said.

“Mobutu regime had the unholy trinity of USA, France and Belgium, which backed him to steal everything from the Congolese people…today, Kabila has the dragon, the Jewish and some multinationals from the Western world both elbowing each other in the scramble for the vast minerals.

But, the question is whether all these deals benefit Congolese or not.” The Congolese diplomat who didn’t want to be named told me, when I met him in Nairobi, early in July, this year.

In 2012 alone China imported 166,000 tons of cobalt concentrates from the DRC, which was more than 90 per cent of China’s total import of cobalt, which is valued at 177,000 tons annually. China is set to remain a major importer of copper and cobalt from Congo during the next decade, thanks to a controversial multi-billion dollar resources-for-infrastructure deal signed between a consortium of Chinese state construction companies and the DRC’s state-owned copper company, Gécamines.

According to documents in our possession the deal created the Sino-Congolese mining joint venture, Sicomines, in which the Chinese partners are the major shareholders. This new company was allocated substantial reserves of copper and cobalt in the province of Katanga. Sicomines is expected to begin production in 2015.

In late 2008, Africa and the world was stunned by the deal sealed between China and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in which the two countries would swap 10 million tonnes of copper ore for US$9 billion loan to construct infrastructure project in the war-torn Central African nation. The deal signed in Beijing gave DR Congo $6bn of desperately needed infrastructure—about 2,400 miles of road, 2,000 miles of railway, 32 hospitals, 145 health centres and two universities.

According to details of the deal, which has been widely criticized by both local and international analysts, in return, China gets a slice of DR Congo’s precious natural resources to feed its booming industries—10m tonnes of copper and 400,000 tonnes of cobalt.

At the current world prices for copper and cobalt, the Chinese side, will earn a whopping overall profit of about $42bn after all the investment’s been paid—including the $9 billion infrastructure loan, according to a report by UK’s Global Witness.

The Financier of the loan is no more than China’s Exim Bank, but the way the deal is designed, it looks like a barter trade—something, which some analysts says it’s not true.

What are the stringent attachments? One of the biggest conditions is that a Chinese company and not the opposite should win a construction tender in all project loaned by Chinese banks. Name any big project financed by China through its financing arm — The State owned Exim Bank through loan or aid in Africa, the winners are always Chinese because it’s their companies that win tenders.

Not only that but also, all the materials required can’t be purchased in Africa, and are mainly imported from China.

According to a report by Global Witness titled, “China and Congo: Friends in need”, published in March 2011, the Chinese partners to the Congo deal promised to provide $9 billion finance for nationwide construction of roads, railways, hospitals, schools and dams, as well as for mine development.

In exchange, the Congolese government pledged to provide the companies with up to ten million tonnes of copper and hundreds of thousands of tonnes of cobalt from mines in the southeastern province of Katanga.

Total revenues from the mines could come to at least $40 billion, even reaching as high a figure as $120 billion, says Global Witness in its comprehensive report we obtained during our investigation. This amounts to roughly four to eleven times Congo’s GDP.

In simple mathematics, China has invested $9 billion in infrastructure development in forms of loan, but in return, the Asian dragon would earn between $40 and $120 billion from the Central Africa’s vast mineral resources.

“This potential mutual benefit should not be squandered; indeed, few people deserve to ‘win’ more than the people of Congo who are among the poorest and most vulnerable on Earth…While the deal is no less transparent than many other mining deals signed by the Congolese government, a lack of information makes it impossible for the Congolese to judge how beneficial it will be for their country.

There is a famous Chinese proverb, referring to risk-taking and gambling. Roughly translated into English, it reads: “If you must play, decide upon three things at the start: the rules of the game, the stakes, and the quitting time”…In Global Witness’ view neither the rules nor the stakes have been made clear,” says a report by Global Witness issued in 2011.

As the West competes on solving Congo’s political and economic crisis, China is nowhere to be seen, though behind the scene the dragon is indeed making a killing in the war-torn DRC.

“It’s one thing to attract investments for the development of your country, but what China is doing in DRC, cast more doubt and is one of those suspicious deals.” A Congolese diplomat who once served as the foreign affairs minister told me in Nairobi, early, in July, this year.
As UK legislator, Eric Joyce, “The Congolese people have huge natural wealth in their country...With some $24 trillion in natural resources, the DRC could be the economic power house of Africa – it’s potential is that great. Sadly the international community is unwilling to act to put an end to the sort of deals that are exposed in these documents.”

**From Kasavubu to Kabila, still same old story?**

When Joseph Desire Mobutu, a cook’s son, who reinvented himself as Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, meaning the all powerful warrior who goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire on his wake, took over his country in 1965, he renamed it Zaire, hoping to end its problems.

Mobutu rose dramatically from secretary of defence in post independence Zaire to the country’s top job—the presidency in what many believe was the secret power creation of Central Intelligence Agency and the Belgian government.

Understanding the current political and economic problems that have engulfed Congo is incomplete process without tracing the dramatic rise of Mobutu and the brutal assassination of Patrice Lumumba.

If there’s a man who authored the Congo’s journey into total darkness, then that’s man was Mobutu, who was strongly supported by what Michela Wrong called the Western troika, which involved USA, Belgium and France.

According to documented details, when the Congo got independence on June 30, 1960, the coalition government, formed by President Joseph Kasavubu and Prime Minister Patrick Lumumba appointed Mobutu secretary of state for national defense.

Eight days later the Congo’s Force Publique mutinied against its Belgian officers. As one of the few officers with any control over the army (gained by liberally dispensing commissions and back pay to the mutineers), Mobutu was in a position to influence the developing power struggle between Kasavubu and Lumumba.

Mobutu covertly supported Kasavubu’s attempt to dismiss Lumumba. When Lumumba rallied his forces to oust Kasavubu in September 1960, Mobutu seized control of the government and announced that he was “neutralizing” all politicians.

In February 1961, however, Mobutu turned over the government to Kasavubu, who made Mobutu commander in chief of the armed forces. In 1965, after a power struggle had developed between President Kasavubu and his premier, Moise Tshombe, Mobutu removed Kasavubu in a coup, becoming the President.

Mobutu’s style of leadership, which to a great extent was blessed by the Western nations especially France, Belgium and USA came to haunt Mobutu for decades, before he was ousted by a rebel leader, Laurent Desire Kabila in 1997.

America needed Mobutu for two major reasons: to control the vast mineral of cobalt, which it needed to manufacture its fighter jets and secondly, Using Congo’s bases as the conduit for arms destined for Angola’s rebels who were under the leadership of Jonas Savimbi.

Michela Wrong, the British author and journalist, captured the story of Mobutu’s rise and fall in her book, “In the footsteps of Mr Kurtz”, in which she says, “All the three nations(USA, France and Belgium) wanted guaranteed access to Zaire’s mineral reserves—especially in the case of US, the cobalt it needed to produce its fighter jets.”

Miss Wrong described this alliance as the troika of Western countries, which backed Mobutu for years, ignoring his poor leadership in Africa’s most rich nation in terms of minerals.

Mobutu, knowing to play his cards very well, also exploited the troika by Western nations at his advantage, plundering and squandering public resources, with nobody from the donor’s countries dared to question what was happening in Zaire.

According to Miss Wrong when his backers attempted to question his plunder, Mobutu would respond by asking, “Do you really expect me to think you’re asking these questions to Israel and Egypt? Perhaps I should convert to Judaism.”

Because of selfish interests, Mobutu enjoyed the troika for nearly three decades, before he was left a lone ranger, in a crucial time when he needed help to cling on power in 1990s.

When his regime collapsed Mobutu left behind damning legacy—a mismanaged economy with national debt amounting to $9.3 billion, a divided country and the most corrupt nation in the world. But the figure varied depending on who tells the story.

“During the dictatorship of Mobutu, Congo accumulated a public external debt of roughly $14 billion. At the same time, Mobutu and his associates extracted wealth from the country...By 1990, real capital flight from Zaire amounted to $12 billion.”, Leonce Ndikumana and James K Boyce wrote in their report titled Congo’s Odious Debt: External Borrowing and Capital Flight in Zaire.

When Mobutu’s successor, Laurent Desire Kabila took over, he also walked into the path of the man he has ousted by renaming his country Democratic Republic of Congo(DRC).Like Mobutu, Kabila too thought that Congo’s problems were in its name.

Julius Nyerere, angered by Kabila’s leadership style is reported to have told him these words: “Am afraid you fought against ‘Mobutuism’ but you are also practicing the same.”

Nearly sixteen years since Mobutu was overthrown, Congo has known no peace, and it seemed the instability and insecurity is there to stay, despite the presence of the world’s second most expensive peace mission with an annual budget of about $1.4 billion.

Not only that but also the country despite being rich in natural resources especially minerals and arable land, Congo is the second most poor country, according to latest statistics from United Nations.
In its 2013 Human Development Report, the United Nations Development Programme ranked the DRC 186 on the Human Development Index, bottom out of 187 countries for which it has sufficient data. Public services - from education and health to water, sanitation and transport - are in an extremely poor state, and more than 87 per cent of the population lives on less than US$1.25 per day.

With nearly over a decade in power, President Joseph Kabila’s government is still struggling with massive poverty, rebellion in most parts of the country and above all political problems.

The rebellion problems have haunted the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since independence. For instance the rebellion in the Kivu region dates back to the 1960s, the most famous being the Mulele uprising, which was followed by the Katanga secession, Ituri and the ever present tensions in Katanga.

As the New Times newspaper puts it in its August 25, 2013, editorial, “Therefore, Congo’s issues are not new, they are just recycled.”

When the United Nations Group of Experts implicated Rwanda and later on Uganda, the world especially the Western world reacted with tough actions suspending aid to the tiny Central African nation, which many agrees has recovered so quickly from the 1994 genocide.

Johnnie Carson, former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, speaking about the escalating conflict in the Eastern Congo on December 11 last year, ten days after M23 withdrawal from Goma, said, “The dialogue on how to resolve the Congo crisis has become unhelpful and polarizing. It has dissolved into emotional grandstanding and finger pointing.”

As Carson put it, the Congo’s crisis turned into an emotional grandstanding and finger pointing last year, with Democratic Republic of Congo being backed by a report by the group of experts, accusing Rwanda and Uganda of meddling on its affairs by supporting the M23 rebels.

Southern African Development Community also supported the accusations labeled against two non-members, Rwanda and Uganda, with the former deciding to deploy the intervention Brigade in order to boost the world’s second most expensive peace keeping army in DRC.

Though Rwanda fought back strongly in attempt to clear its image, the fight was just crocodile tears because the judgment has already been passed by the group of experts, who in their report stated that they have undisputed evidence about the Kigali’s meddling in Congo’s political affairs.

But, beyond Rwanda’s involvement in Congo’s affairs as claimed by UN’s Group of Experts, lies the politics of betrayal, ethnicity problems, scramble for natural resources, and lack of strong leadership.

The politics of betrayal

The politics of betrayal, which have dominated the Democratic Republic of Congo dating back to early 1960s, though often skipped by both regional and international players in the country’s affairs, is one of the major factors that contributed to the turmoil in the minerals-rich central African nation.

Congo’s first Prime Minister was betrayed by among other things his fellow politicians who were supported by the Belgium and America, during an attempt to break the Soviet Empire as the cold war era unfolded.

Lumumba, the first legally elected prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), was assassinated 51 years ago -- on 17 January 1961. According to a report published by the UK’s Guardian newspaper in January last year, this heinous crime was a culmination of two inter-related assassination plots by American and Belgian governments, which used Congolese accomplices and a Belgian execution squad to carry out the deed.

Ludo De Witte, the Belgian author of the best book on this crime, qualifies it as “the most important assassination of the 20th century”. The assassination’s historical importance lies in a multitude of factors, the most pertinent being the global context in which it took place, its impact on Congolese politics since then and Lumumba’s overall legacy as a nationalist leader.

For 126 years, the US and Belgium have played key roles in shaping Congo’s destiny. In April 1884, seven months before the Berlin Congress, the US became the first country in the world to recognise the claims of King Leopold II of the Belgians to the territories of the Congo Basin.

When the atrocities related to brutal economic exploitation in Leopold’s Congo Free State resulted in millions of fatalities, the US joined other world powers to force Belgium to take over the country as a regular colony.

And it was during the colonial period that the US acquired a strategic stake in the enormous natural wealth of the Congo, following its use of the uranium from Congolese mines to manufacture the first atomic weapons, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, De Witte wrote.

“To fight him, the US and Belgium used all the tools and resources at their disposal, including the United Nations secretariat, under Dag Hammarskjöld and Ralph Bunche, to buy the support of Lumumba’s Congolese rivals, and hired killers.” The UK’s Guardian reported on January 17, 2011.

The assassination took place at a time when the country had fallen under four separate governments: the central government in Kinshasa (then Léopoldville); a rival central government by Lumumba’s followers in Kisangani (then Stanleyville); and the secessionist regimes in the mineral-rich provinces of Katanga and South Kasai.

Since Lumumba’s assassination had removed what the west saw as the major threat to their interests in the Congo, internationally led efforts were undertaken to restore the authority of the moderate and pro-western regime in Kinshasa over the entire coun-
try. These resulted in ending the Lumumbist regime in Kisangani in August 1961, the secession of South Kasai in September 1962, and the Katanga secession in January 1963.

The politics of betrayal never ended there: During the Congo’s first war, which started in Goma town in a bid to oust the Dictator Mobutu regime, two partners betrayed each other. General Andre Kissase Ngandu, a prominent rebel fighter with revolutionary credentials, who was also the president of the AFDL’s military wing and the National Resistance Council (CNRD), was betrayed by his colleague, Laurent Desire Kabila.

General Ngandu was assassinated on 4 January 1997, in North Kivu by Rwandan Tutsi soldiers in what was coordinated by Kabila. During the assassination, Kabila’s position was that of spokesperson and head of the political wing.

Following the assassination, Kabila became the leader of the movement, promising to step down once, Dictator Mobutu is ousted. But, when his forces, which were heavily backed by Rwanda and Uganda captured Kinshasa, Kabila refused to step down, and automatically became the President of Zaire, renaming it, “the Democratic Republic of Congo”.

As if that wasn’t enough. He ordered all foreign forces, mainly Rwanda and Uganda, which had supported him heavily, to leave Congo immediately. Kabila also revoked the citizenship of Congolese Tutsi known as Banyamulenge, who were majority in his rebel faction, ordering them to return back to Rwanda.

Kabila decided purposely to form an alliance with Hutu rebels in his bid to fight the Kigali dominance, though earlier, it was agreed that Rwanda will support him to oust Mobutu and in return he would also help his masters to fight the Interahamwe and Hutu militias.

What followed was a fierce battle, known as Second Congo War, which was clouded by the assassination of Laurent Kabila in January 2001, by one his bodyguards in what is believed to be a payback after he betrayed his backers.

When the Lusaka peace agreement was signed after the assassination of Kabila, many thought there would be a breakthrough, but again the politics of betrayal took place. This time it was Kabila’s son, Joseph Kabila, who betrayed his colleagues from the Kivu Province. In return, those who felt betrayed formed their rebel faction operating under CNDP.

The leader of this movement was none, but, Laurent Nkunda. Then came another looming peace agreement in 2009, whereby Rwanda was told to disarm and arrest Nkunda, in order to pave the way for ceasefire. Rwanda did what it was told.

After the arrest of Nkunda, Jean Bosco Ntaganda became the leader of CNDP, with Makenga being his number two. This move brought a temporary ceasefire on March 23, 2009 when a fragile peace agreement was signed in Nairobi.

Three years later, ex-CNDP rebels led by Makenga and Ntaganda feeling a betrayal from Kinshasa regime, rebelled against the Congolese national army, and formed M23 faction.
At the other hand, Banyamulenge feels betrayed by the politicians in Kinshasa, a move, which they say, has motivated their rebellion for years in attempt to fight for political supremacy as well as protecting their minority Tutsi against Hutu rebels known as Forces for Democratic Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

The ordinary citizens especially Congolese also feel betrayed by politicians and international community. They are raped, killed and displaced in the presence of the world's second most expensive army, known by its acronym as MONUSCO.

With about $16.8 billion spent in bankrolling the peace mission in Congo, the Congolese have never seen peace. What they have witnessed is elusive peace, guns, bullets and military tanks. What they have seen is five million deaths, hundreds thousand rapes and above all cheap politics.

Since the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese have never known what lasting peace is all about. They survived under Mobutu, who almost fleeced the country under the great support of the west, and when Kabila came in, they thought the beginning of peace and prosperity has finally started.

But, they were all wrong. What followed was even worse in terms of human disaster that what transpired during the Mobutu's era.

During the post Mobutu, Congo faced a humanitarian disaster in which over 5 million people died of war-related causes. The plunder of Congo's vast minerals resources continued at an alarming pace.

By the time Mobutu was ousted in 1997, Congo's foreign aid that the country has received since 1975 was $9.3 billion, which ended in secret bank's accounts in Switzerland as well as buying properties in Belgium and France.

Rwanda also feels betrayed by the regime it supported heavily during the 'liberation' of Congo from the brutal and failed regime of dictator Mobutu in early 1990s.

"Today, DR Congo works together with our enemies (FDLR)...not only that but also Kinshasa government accuses Rwanda of causing problems there while they know how we fought hard to save Congo with the little resources we have." A Rwandese senior military officer who participated in the 1990s war against Mobutu told.

Speaking under the conditions of anonymity in Kigali, the senior military officer said, "Rwanda might have erred somewhere in Congo, but the main problem in Congo is lack of trust and politics of exclusions... Even when the opposition(rebels) were included in the government they were still viewed with a suspicious eyes."

However, during our investigation, we also established that Joseph Kabila, since assuming power in 2001 following the assassination of his father, has tried to reach out to his major opponents especially rebels. He included Mbusa Nyamwisi in his government after the 2006 election in which he appointed him the Minister for Foreign affairs. In 2009, he integrated ex-CNDP rebels in his army following the Nairobi peace accord signed on March 23.

I asked the Rwandese top military officer about measures taken by Joseph Kabila to reach out to his enemies, and his response was, "peace agreement should come from the heart of those who rule...it shouldn’t be something imparted in you by donors or foreigners."

"In 2009, Kabila signed the peace agreement because of the two major issues: one he was under pressure from the international community and donors who were willing to finance the 2011 election but under conditions that Congo should mend fences with rebels.

"Second, he was desperately eyeing to win his second term in office and he needed peace." The Rwandese top military officer who also once worked at the country’s intelligence circles told me.

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How Hutus militias became a state within a state in Eastern Congo; Can FDLR rebels follow the M23 path after surviving for two decades? Is there any link between FDLR and Dar es Salaam?

FDLR rose from the ashes of the 1994 Genocide perpetrators to form a strong Hutus extremist army, thanks to the free handout and safe heaven provided by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Eastern Province of Congo’s Kivu Province.

The formation of the rebel faction was spearheaded by among others, Theoneste Bogosora, a man dubbed the architect of genocide and General Augustine Bizimungu who was Chief of Staff of Rwandan army during the genocide.

After months of fierce battle, finally the Kagame-led rebellion ended hundred days of genocide, but also opened the exodus of refugees who fled Rwanda fearing for the retaliation from the RPF regime. In July 1994, an average of 12,000 Rwandan refugees mainly Hutus entered the Democratic Republic of Congo every hour through the town of Goma, fleeing the RPF soldiers who had just toppled the Rwandan regime.

But as the humanitarian crisis dominated the headline, behind the scene, masters of the genocide began a new chapter of re-assembling a defeated Hutu-led regime with a mission to fight and regain their glory, which they have lost after a defeat by Kagame and his allies.

“Housed in so-called “refugee camps” along the border with Rwanda, fed and in effect financed by the international community via the UNHCR and a host of Western NGOs, rearmed by Congo’s Mobutu and France’s Mitterrand, and advised by European friends from among French officialdom and the Christian Democratic International, “White Father” missionaries and various European NGOs, the genocidal Hutu Power movement began to regroup from its military defeat in Rwanda.” -- RICHARD JOHNSON, RETIRED AMERICAN DIPLOMAT

As Africa especially Congolese ponder the future of the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo following the M23 rebels defeat by the UN intervention Brigade in collaboration with Congo’s national army, Africa and the world want the focus to be turned on Forces for Democratic Liberation of Rwanda(FDLR), a Hutu-led rebel faction that has operated undefeated in Eastern Congo for two decades.

In this first series of our special report on Eastern Congo and the aftermath of M23 defeat, we bring...
you the inside story of FDLR, how it became a state within a state in Eastern Congo; How it finances its operation through illegal business in minerals valued at $50million yearly.

FARDC, key players now want the focus on Forces for Democratic Liberation of Rwanda(FDLR). M23 rebel faction also known as Congolese Revolutionary Army, which was mainly formed by ex- National Congress for Defence of the People (CNDP) fighters led by Brigadier General Sultan Makenga and General Bosco Ntaganda mutinied against the Kinshasa regime early in January, last year and created a crisis that lasted for nearly twenty four months.

But, after facing strong offensive from UN Intervention Brigade, the M23 rebel faction was forced to abandon the battlefield, opting for peaceful means to achieve their political goals in DRC.

Following the defeat, leaders from Southern African Development Community(SADC) and International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) agreed that the focus should now be on FDLR and other rebel forces that have rocked Eastern Congo for years now.

Though, there are about a dozen rebel factions in Eastern Congo alone, the most known faction that has survived undefeated for two decades is FDLR, which has been operating inside Congo, taxing Congolese taxes to fund its operation and controlling the illegal minerals trade.

Rwanda, a country accused by UN’s Group of Experts of aiding the defeated M23 rebel faction last week said it is optimistic that the government in Kinshasa, backed by a UN force with a more aggressive mandate, will turn its attention to FDLR.

Rwandan officials who attended a regional summit in Pretoria, South Africa, last week, told The Citizen it was decided that the allied forces of DRC and the Force Intervention Brigade of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Congo should face FDLR, along a myriad of other militia groups in the war-torn region of Eastern Congo.

The meeting, which brought together two regional blocs; the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC), was a follow up on the implementation of the UN-backed Framework for Peace, Security and Cooperation for the DRC and the Region, which was signed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in February, this year.

The Rwandan High Commissioner to South Africa, Vincent Karega, who was part of the Rwandan delegation to the summit, reported that the Heads of State and Government summit resolved that FDLR should urgently be expelled from the Congo.

The group has in its ranks elements who fled to the Congo after active participation in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and moderate Hutus, killing about a million innocent Rwandans. The militia is also accused of committing grave human rights violations during its nearly 20 years of stranglehold on large swathes of eastern Congo region. UN’s Special envoy Ms Mary Robinson said on Monday in Addis Ababa following the M23 defeat, the priority would now shift to ending the FDLR, a descendant of Hutu extremist groups that carried out the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

“There is a different perception of what the government and MONUSCO together are doing in eastern Congo, but now all of the armed groups are going to be taken on,” the former Irish president said, referring to the UN mission in the country.” Ms Robinson told France News Agency, AFP.

But, some analysts, say there are serious challenges to fight FDLR considering its alleged collaboration with Congolese national army, FARDC, in fighting the Tutsi-led rebellion including the defeated M23 rebels. In July this year, Rwanda, claiming to have obtained credible evidence, told the UN Security Council that Congolese national army was collaborating with FDLR to fight the M23 rebels in Eastern Congo.

The Congolese regime strongly denied the allegations, but few days, later, a report by UN’s Monitoring Group also implicated DRC when it claimed that there were some collaboration between the Congolese national army and Hutus led rebel faction, FDLR.

Not only that but also, Tanzania, a country that it forces helped crushing the M23 rebels in Eastern Congo, was named by The East African newspaper, in August, this year as having smuggled the FDLR second top commander Gen Stanislas Bigaruka to its territory via Lake Tanganyika in January, this year, in order to get military briefings about Eastern Congo before deploying its forces there.

Since that period, there have been contradicting reports about the whereabouts of General Bigaruka. Some reports claimed that Bigaruka was grabbed by Rwandese intelligence shortly after his meeting with top Tanzania military officers in Kigoma region early in January, this year, while others maintain that it’s the Dar es Salaam regime that knows his whereabouts.
Neither Tanzania nor Rwanda has openly spoken about the whereabouts.

**The genesis of FDLR**

For Dominique Ekofo, a district administrator from Rutshuru, in the Eastern Kivu Province, the Forces for Democratic Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) is a Congolese problem, not a foreign crisis, because at the end of the day, it’s the Congolese who have borne the brunt of the presence of the Hutu militias during the past 19 years.

“The problem of the FDLR is a Congolese problem only. The victims (women, youth and children) aren’t Belgian, French or German– they are Congolese. Thus the solution must also be Congolese.” Ekofo says, adding that the time has come for the Congolese to say no to the injustices and sufferings brought by FDLR.

But, for the Kinshasa regime, FDLR is more than what Ekofo says. It’s a Rwandese problem, not a Congolese matter. For President Paul Kagame and his country, FDLR is a biggest threat that Rwanda has fought for over two decades, and still determined, to battle in the name of preventing the architect of genocide from returning to haunt the Kigali regime.

But to President Jakaya Kikwete, a man whose country has sent troops in the war-ravaged Congo under the umbrella of Southern African Development Community (SADC) intervention Brigade, FDLR is more than a rebel faction: It’s a political party that Rwanda should negotiate with if the tiny Central African country needs a lasting solution for its future stability.

What is FDLR? Why did it take so long for this rebel faction to be dismantled? What’s its ideology? How does it bankroll its operation in Congo for the past twenty years of its existence? Can this time this Hutus-led rebel faction be defeated once and for all?

According to documented evidence, FDLR rose from the ashes of the 1994 Genocide perpetrators to form a strong Hutus extremist army, thanks to the free handout and safe haven provided by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Eastern Province of Congo’s Kivu Province.

The assassination of Rwanda’s former President Juvenal Habyarimana, which opened the bloody chapter of massacre against Tutsi and moderate Hutus, attracted the wrath of RPF attacks under Paul Kagame in 1994. During the assassination, RPF led by Paul Kagame were just 40km outside Kigali, waiting the implementation of the Arusha peace accord, which among other things would have given the Tutsi rebels some key position within the transition government that was to be announced soon by Habyarimana.

After months of fierce battle, finally the Kagame-led rebellion ended hundred days of genocide, but also opened the exodus of refugees who fled Rwanda fearing for the retaliation from the RPF regime.

In July 1994, an average of 12,000 Rwandan refugees mainly Hutus entered the Democratic Republic of Congo every hour through the town of Goma, fleeing the RPF soldiers who had just toppled the Rwandan regime.

Among them there were also Tutsi who fled in fear of the killings that were launched after the plane carrying President Habyarimana was gunned down on April 6, as it prepared to land at Kanombe international airport.

This massive influx created a severe humanitarian crisis, as there was acute lack of shelter, food and water. Shortly after the arrival of nearly one million refugees, a deadly cholera outbreak claimed thousands of lives in the Hutu refugee camps around Goma.

But as the humanitarian crisis dominated the headline, behind the scene, masters of the genocide begun a new chapter of re-assembling a defeated Hutus-led regime with a mission to fight and regain their glory, which they have lost after a defeat by Kagame and his allies.

According to documents obtained during our investigation, which were also corroborated through interviewing various sources, to regain their lost glory, the ousted Rwandese regime assembled various military wings to form a new government that could then fight RPF regime.

Among the forces assembled were Interahamwe militias, rogue Presidential Brigade and the defeated national army to form a force, was to be used to fight the RPF-led regime.

According to documented evidence, this new formed force used refugees as an umbrella and set up operations from the camps around Goma attacking ethnic Tutsis in the Kivus and Rwandan government forces stationed at the Congolese boarder.

During the day time, they were refugees living on UNHCR handouts but in the mid-night, they were men of war in mission to complete the unfinished business: Wiping out all the cockroaches(Tutsi) and advancing back to Kigali to regain the lost glory.
Some of the top leaders have fled with millions of cash, which were also used to bankroll the operation. With Dictator Mobutu under siege from Goma based rebels led by General Andre Ngandou Kisase and Laurent Kabila, he quickly formed an alliance with the Hutus born within the UNHCR camps, for two major reasons: Help the Kishansa regime defeat the Congolese militias and in return Mobutu would also back the Rwandese rebels to topple the RPF regime.

In his report headlined, “Is Kagame Africa’s Lincoln or a tyrant exploiting Rwanda’s tragic history?” the UK journalist Chris McGreal put it this way: The Hutu army and its allied extremist militia, the interahamwe, were watered and fed in United Nations refugee camps even as they kept up the ethnic killings through cross-border raids.

Kagame had few resources to draw on internally with many traditional institutions, such as the Catholic church compromised by their part in the killings, including the involvement of priests and nuns in murder.”

Richard Johnson, retired American diplomat in his book titled, “The Travesty of Human Rights Watch on Rwanda”, released in the form of electronic copy in March, 2013 narrates how FDLR used the refugee camps in the aftermath of Rwandan genocide to consolidate its military capability: “Housed in so-called “refugee camps” along the border with Rwanda, fed and in effect financed by the international community via the UNHCR and a host of Western NGOs, re-armed by Congo’s Mobutu and France’s Mitterrand, and advised by European friends from among French officialdom and the Christian Democratic International, “White Father” missionaries and various European NGOs, the genocidal Hutu Power movement began to regroup from its military defeat in Rwanda.

The mastermind behind the FDLR were military men like Colonel Théoneste Bagosora (often described as the “author” of the genocide) and the then Chief of Staff, General Augustine Bizimungu, who were both later arrested and convicted of genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) located in Arusha, Tanzania.

Chris McGreal, one of the few foreign journalists who witnessed the Rwanda genocide first-hand, dubbed Bogosora “Rwanda’s Himmler, meaning the man behind the genocide.”

“You might call him the Heinrich Himmler of Rwanda. Theoneste Bagosora was less grand than the Nazi SS leader, eschewing pitch-black uniforms and grand military parades, but he espoused an ideology as hateful and ultimately as deadly as the man who oversaw the Holocaust. And he was just as organised.” McGreal wrote in his report published by the Guardian in 2008.

Born in 1941, Bagosora, was a retired colonel and chief of staff in Rwanda’s defence ministry when, in April 1994, he gave the order to implement a long-standing plan to exterminate his country’s Tutsi minority. One hundred days later, about 800,000 people had been murdered in one of the most extensive mobilisations of a population against its fellow citizens ever seen.

Bagosora was a member of the Akazu, an extremist network drawn from north-west Rwanda with Habyarimana’s wife at its centre. The Akazu was involved in weapons and drug smuggling but, more than anything, it was a solidly pro-Hutu ideological group that viewed the Tutsi minority as the enemy.

Bagosora, who was convicted to life sentence in 2008 by the ICTR, was in league with fellow Akazu members who established a militia, the Interahamwe – whose central ideology was hatred against the minority Tutsis. In 1992, Bagosora instructed senior defence ministry officials to draw up the names of those deemed to be enemies of Rwanda and their “accomplices”. The list included moderate Hutu politicians who wanted a negotiated deal with Tutsi rebels, and many prominent Tutsis. A copy of the list was found in the car of a senior army officer killed in a car crash.

When the Hutus dominated regime was ousted in July, 1994, Bogosora and his fellows fled to Congo’s Kivu province before some of them sought political refugee abroad. But as they fled Rwanda, they went together with their unfinished agenda: To eliminate all Tutsis and return back to reclaim their lost glory, which came to dominate the centre of the Hutus led militias currently operating in DRC under the umbrella of FDLR.

Whereas the RDR is the direct political descendent of the Hutu Power regime that carried out the genocide against the Rwandan Tutsi in 1994, the FDLR is the direct military descendent of the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) and Interahamwe militia that spearheaded the killing, says Johnson whose professional experience includes the genocide in Bosnia, and personal experience in living in Rwanda in 2008-2010.

According to Tom Ndahiro, the author of Friends of Evils, which is a book tracing how those who committed genocide have denied what transpired in 1994, when Laurent Kabila finally fell out with his allies from Rwanda and Uganda, FDLR was quick to extend a
helping hand to support him during what came to be known as the Congo’s second war.

According to Ndahiro, the former RPF spokesman turned a researcher on Genocide issues in Rwanda and Great Lakes Region, throughout its nearly two decades of existence, FDLR has played three major roles: first it becomes a proxy army to the Congolese regime, a situation that enabled it to survive dating back to the Mubutu era to the current regime. By playing this role, it has managed to remain safe because it receive intelligence information and finances from Kinshasa, says Ndahiro.

Rwanda claims that while Congolese regime in the past few years conducted joint operation with Rwandese regime, behind the scene Kinshasa provided intelligence report to FDLR to help its key players remain safe.

But The Citizen couldn’t independently verify these claims, though during our investigation, we met one senior Congolese national army officer who described FDLR as the bargaining chip used to suppress any attempt by Rwandese authority to invade DRC.

“This is a game...FDLR is our bargaining chip with Rwanda. We learnt a bitter lesson when our friends from Rwanda decided to fight us during the second Congo War, and since then we decided to use their enemy (FDLR) to suppress Kagame and his soldiers." A senior Military officer from the Congolese army told me in Goma, early this year."

The second role of FDLR has been fighting or killing Tutsi in the Eastern province of Kivu. As M23 military leader Sultan Emanuel Makenga put it during our interview in Goma in December, 2012, FDLR has been targeting Tutsi especially the Banyamulenge clan. To FDLR, any Tutsi regardless whether he or she is a Congolese or Rwandese is an enemy that deserves to be killed at any cost.

This scenario has become replica of the 1994 genocide. Today, the Tutsi under their rebel leaders like Makenga claims that they are in war to defend their people who have been ignored by the Kinshasa regime since the fallout in 1998.

General Makenga claimed in our interview that after the fallout with the late Laurent Kabila, all Tutsi became the target. First they were ordered to return to Rwanda despite the facts that they were born in Congo. Secondly, because Kagame and his allied are Tutsi, the fallout with Kinshasa regime under Kabila, the Congolese Tutsi were sidelined or victimized.

“Our people are defenseless...Just like we were called cockroaches in Rwanda, here in DRC, to justify injustices against us, we are all Banyamulenge and we should be wiped out.

“We are left vulnerable in the area that’s highly dominated by FDLR...The Congolese government sees us as dangerous elements from Rwanda and so does FDLR. We are fighting two wars—the one against the Kinshasa regime and the second one with Hutu militias known as FDLR” Brigadier General Makenga, a rebel leader, currently held in Uganda after he surrendered last week following a major defeat in Eastern Congo says.

Laurent Nkunda who is under house arrest in Rwanda, Jean Bosco Ntaganda who is in the International Criminal Court’s custody in Hague and Makenga shares similar views in defending their actions in the Eastern part of Congo.
The third role of FLDR has been to fight in order to overthrow the Rwandese regime. This is the main agenda for the FDLR, which has been fighting for 19 years, and still determined to soldier on with its war until the goal is achieved.

During my investigation, I established that Rwanda’s biggest worry is still FDLR, even though the latest UN experts, which came out in July, 2013, claims that the Hutu rebels have been weakened with the current estimates put their number at only 1500 soldiers.

“Our biggest threat remains FDLR…they have made DRC their stronghold for many years, plundering Congolese natural resources to finance their genocide agenda against our country.”

“They fled Rwanda as refugees, but now want to return as rebels with agenda to overthrow the government and continue with their unfinished mission of genocide…but they will never succeed at all.

One senior Rwandan security officer put in this way as we debated whether FDLR was still a real threat to Kigali regime: “The genocide authors have remained at large in Eastern DRC with one mission of attacking and ousting the current regime.

When you say they have been weakened, that’s not true because from our own sources within the DRC government we know that FDLR has been re-organising itself, being supported by President Kabila’s army.

The Rwandan security officer who once fought in Congo during the Second War added during our discussion in Kigali, early, this year, “Today, we have evidence of FDLR being supplied weapons with senior officers from the Congolese national army…if this is the case, then what do you do when you are in our position?

What angers Mr Kagame and his allies is what he describes as double standard about the Congo crisis: While Rwanda is being crucified for allegedly supporting M23 rebels, Kigali regime sees Congolese regime and international community as an obstacle in eliminating the FDLR rebels.

In Kigali in April, this year, Mr Kagame strongly denies continuing Rwandan involvement in Congo saying the UN report was the stitching together of rumour, speculation and lies, and why it is decades of Belgian, French and American involvement in that blighted country that is the real cause of its problems.

“I’m telling people look at themselves in the mirror. They are the ones responsible for problems in Congo, not me,” he says. “Up to this moment they’ve never given anybody a bit of what they’re talking about – evidence,” he says. The US froze military aid. Britain suspended some financial support and then put in place new controls.

Mr Kagame regards Rwanda as the victim of a diplomatic lynch mob and accuses the British government of laying the groundwork by sending the BBC and Channel 4 News to file reports critical of Rwanda. “It’s just a circus. You start wondering about the people you’re dealing with,” he says.

According to some of its military commanders, the third role of FDLR is to fight in order to overthrow the Rwandese regime. This is the main agenda for the FDLR, which has been fighting for 19 years, and still determined to soldier on with its war until the goal is achieved.

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Is FDLR a Congolese Proxy army?

In July, this year, United Nations monitoring group released a report saying, FDLR, a Hutu group opposed to the Tutsi-led Rwandan government, has also “continued to weaken” during the first half of 2012.

The UN monitoring group estimates that FDLR strength at about 1,500 soldiers, with depletion in the group’s ranks attributed to “a high surrender rate. The monitoring report says the FDLR “suffers from internal divisions and a weak hierarchy that lacks the capability to command and control the organisation’s entire operations.”

Leadership of the Hutu rebel force is divided between “hardliners who want to continue the armed struggle and moderates belonging to young generations who favour demobilisation and reintegration,” the UN reports.

The report also confirms claims of coalition between Hutus-led rebel faction and Kinshasa regime when the UN group says, “The FDLR was assisted in recent months, however, by units of the Congolese armed forces.

According to the group’s report, the two entities joined forces on a local level in parts of the eastern DRC where the Tutsi-led M23 had been gaining strength.

The confirmation by the UN monitoring group that FDLR is supported by the Congolese national army corroborated the long-standing claims by Rwanda’s regime that the Hutus rebels have been fighting alongside DRC government forces to suppress rebellion by Congolese Tutsi.

On July 16, this year, few weeks after the UN monitoring report came out, Rwanda officially accused the newly-deployed Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), under the UN Stabilisation Mission in the Congo (Monusco), of backing collaboration between DR Congo-based Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda militia (FDLR) and the Congolese army.

The accusations are contained in a letter that Rwanda’s Ambassador to the UN Eugene-Richard Gasana wrote to the US’s Ambassador Rosemary DiCarlo in her role as this month’s president of the UN Security Council.

The letter follows the earlier one that the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Louise Mushikiwabo, sent to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon last week, according to Gasana’s letter. Ambassador Gasana, also Rwanda’s State minister for cooperation, said in his July letter that senior FIB commanders have held several meetings with FDLR commanders to discuss cooperation while the force is supposed to hunt down the rebels.

"The Government of Rwanda has credible, reliable and detailed information that various forms of tactical and strategic collaboration with the FDLR were discussed during those meeting,” Gasana said in the letter. Their actions, implicating senior UN commanders picking sides among the very armed groups whose military activities they are meant to deter, is of serious concern.”

Mr Ndahiro says the collaboration between FDLR and the Congolese national army doesn’t need more concrete evidence because there is already credible proof to prove that ‘the two have been working jointly for years.

There have been symbolic gestures, says Ndahiro: In 2001, when the international community pressured Joseph Kabila in the framework of the peace negotiations for the Congo to disarm those living in his country who were responsible for the genocide in Rwanda, the Congolese president asked the FDLR to send him a brigade that he could disarm and house so he could show the world the only Rwandan soldiers available. Brigade 1780 was chosen, sent to Kabila, and their weapons and munitions were burned publicly before cameras on September 12, 2001.
However, the services rendered to Kabila by his Rwandan auxiliaries make it difficult for the government to move against them in any way. “But all this was just a ploy...the truth is that Kabila couldn’t destroy the FDLR because he wants to use it to control DRC’s leverage with Rwanda.” Major Ndahiro adds.

The Kinshasa regime has vehemently denied any coalition with the FDLR despite the strong accusations against Congolese national army issued by both Rwanda and UN experts.

**What UN group of experts say about FDLR backers**

The UN group of experts in its series of reports released between 2009 and 2013 state clearly the involvement of Congolese regime through its army in supporting the Hutus rebellion.

For instance the 2009 report by UN group of experts confirms beyond reasonable doubt that FDLR was fully supported by the top commanders from the Congolese national army when it said: “FDLR continues to benefit from residual but significant support from top commanders of the FARDC, particularly those officers in the 10th military region (South Kivu), and has sealed strategic alliances with other armed groups in both North and South Kivu.

The report also accuses neighbouring countries, Tanzania, included of supporting the Hutu rebels, though Dar es Salam through Foreign Affairs Minister Bernard Membe strongly denied the accusations. “External support networks, both regional and international, have been used by FDLR in the field to counteract the effects of Kimia II, for instance networks in Burundi and Tanzania." Read part of the UN report.

Operation Kimia II, which was an offensive against FDLR was launched by the Congolese national army (FARDC) in March 2009, with the support of the UN peacekeeping mission to the DRC, MONUSCO. Kimia II was extended to South-Kivu province in July, 2009 and continued in both provinces at the end of the year.

According to Amnesty International, the military operations followed a rapprochement between the governments of the DRC and Rwanda and a peace deal in early 2009 to end the rebellion by the Rwanda-backed National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) armed group in North-Kivu.

As part of the peace deal, large numbers of CNDP and other armed group fighters were hurriedly integrated into the FARDC and took a leading role in anti-FDLR operations. The government failed to vet, train or properly pay these newly integrated forces. Former armed group chains of command were left intact.

But, the very same Congolese army that was supposed to fight FDLR was later on accused of selling weapons to Hutu rebels, casting doubt on whether the 19-year old rebels could be defeated by Kinshasa regime.

For instance details gathered during our investigation show that on December 13, 2008, the Congolese national army diverted to FDLR 14,000 rounds of 7.62x39mm ammunition (Kalashnikov type) from the official FARDC stockpile under the control of the commanders of the 10th military region in Kivu province.

The documents that prove this deadly business ‘rest in peace in UN’s archive in New York.’ UN report says, Testimonies from five separate former FDLR combatants and three FARDC officers indicated that Col David Rugayi, the leader 14th integrated brigade, has been responsible for the diversion of large amounts of weapons to the FDLR on several occasions in 2008, notably in February, June, October, November and December.

According to these testimonies, the weapons delivered included hundreds of 107mm cannon rockets, a recoiless 107mm cannon, several RPGs, three machine guns of 12.7mm and 14.5mm caliber and two hundred boxes of 7.62x39mm ammunition (roughly 50,000 rounds), 230 AK-47s and several 82mm mortars."

Four FDLR ex-combatants interviewed separately by the group of experts confirmed several deliveries of weapons and ammunition to FDLR units based in the Uvira and Fizi areas of South Kivu since November 2008.

For instance, the report says, one of the ex-combatants confirmed that he had been involved in offloading ammunition from boats arriving from Tanzania on the Congolese side of Lake Tanganyika several times in 2009. The last delivery he was involved in was in April 2009, when he helped offload ammunition and 82mm mortars in boxes near Kavimvira, the lakeside border region between Burundi and the DRC.

In the course of the same interview, he declared that his commander had informed him that the ammunition had been sent across from Tanzania, says the UN report obtained by the Citizen during our investigation.

Another FDLR ex-combatant testified before UN
group of experts that he saw an FDLR column in March 2009 moving R-4 assault rifles, AK-47s, around 100 RPG’s and boxes of ammunition previously delivered by truck to Lulimba in South Kivu. The officer claimed that he had been informed by the officers in the column that the delivery had come across Lake Tanganyika from Tanzania.

Another FDLR ex-combatant testified to the Group that he had been involved in offloading a truck which delivered around 100 boxes of ammunition, 10 machines guns and several RPG’s in the Uvira area in November 2008. The fourth ex-combatant also stated to the Group that he had witnessed a large delivery of ammunition and 107mm rockets in the Kigushu area of Uvira territory in January 2009.

All these claims backed with evidence are documented in the UN group of experts report.

Is Tanzania involved?

When the UN group of expert accused Tanzania of supporting the FDLR rebels, Dar es Salaam regime strongly denied the accusations. But amid denials, behind the scene, the government initiated a secret investigation to investigate the claims by UN’s group of experts.

“The investigation was conducted in 2010…it proved that there were some senior military and government officers who were secretly supporting FDLR to secure weapons and finances.”

But, what did the UN find regarding Tanzania’s involvement in the supporting of Hutus rebels? Below is portion of the report that states how Dar es Salaam was implicated in the Hutu rebels operating in Eastern part of Congo.

Whether measured by the total numbers of its fighters or its actions during the past two decades, FDLR, though viewed by some regional commentators as a political party, to Kagame and his government, this is the biggest threat that they have to fight at any cost.

When the UN report came out in December 2009, few days later the Ndagunzi left Tanzania to the unknown destination. His whereabouts remained top secret throughout the 2010, though his businesses continue to operate in Dar es Salaam.

Though Dar es Salaam strongly denied any involvement in the FDLR operation in Congo, the evidence adduced by UN's group of experts was compelling and also indicating Tanzania, a country well respected in liberation struggle as well as peace restoration in Africa.

But, the man accused of financing and arming FDLR returned to Dar es Salaam since the beginning of 2012, taking a low profile while maintaining his contacts with the Hutu rebels, according to senior government official who declined to be named during our interview.

On December 8, 2009, the Police in Dar es Salaam said it has launched an investigation on all individuals named in the UN group of experts report, which linked those named with arms trafficking to Congo’s FDLR.

Inspector General of Police, Saidi Mwema, told reporters in Dar es Salaam that his force had launched investigation following grave allegations leveled against Tanzania by the group of experts. But, till today, no any individual was arrested and prosecuted.

In 2009, December, UN’s Group of Experts released a detailed report in which it accuses some senior government officials in Dar es Salaam of supporting the Hutu rebels, FDLR, based in Eastern Congo for 19 years now. Though Dar es Salaam strongly denied these allegations, the Group of experts insisted that they had a compelling evidence to back their claims.

How FDLR operates

FDLR has been the most brutal rebel faction in the Eastern Congo, forcibly recruiting youths and taxing Congolese what it calls liberation tax. Those who defect, if they are caught, are subject to serious torture and eventually killings, while the entire episode is recorded.

According to some of the defectors, the recorded message is televised to the new recruits in order to warn them from any attempt to abandon the rebel faction.

In 2011, for instance, Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), a UN news agency, captured testimonies of some of the FDLR defectors, some of them children recruited forcibly to join the Hutu rebel faction. Peter Nhimiyimana, who turned 19 this year, was among those who were rescued by the UN peacekeepers in Eastern Congo.

He told IRIN news agency that he knew the risks of deserting the FDLR because during his more than two years with the militia group in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), his commanding officer had forced him and other members of his unit to watch the decapitation of two of his friends for their failed escape bid.
“A colonel cut their heads off and then told us: ‘This is an example for anyone who tries to leave [the FDLR]. If you protest [at the punishment], you will also be executed.’ I was frightened. But, I knew I had to leave,” Nhimiyimana told IRIN at the Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration and Resettlement (DDRRR) camp in the eastern city of Goma. “If I had been caught I would have had my throat cut.”

According to IRIN report, Nhimiyimana, a Rwandan national, arrived as a baby with his mother as part of the mass exodus to the DRC after Rwanda’s 1994 genocide and was forcibly recruited into the FDLR at 15. “I carried an AK-47, but I did household work - washing and cleaning - for my commander in Musinga. I was never involved in fighting, but life is hard [in the bush].” He reportedly told IRIN

As a child soldier, he planned his escape meticulously. He first went on “family leave” to visit his father in the North Kivu town of Masisi and the two then arranged a rendezvous in the forest. He made his escape at night and after a five-hour walk met his father, left his weapon with a civilian, and then surrendered at a nearby base of the UN Stabilization Mission in DRC (MONUSCO). There are many children like Nhimiyimana who in the past decade have been forced to join FDLR in order to support the ‘liberation’ struggle against the Kigali regime. Some died in the frontline while the luckiest ones escaped from the bush.

During my investigation, I came across stunning facts about FDLR. From its well established structure, its finance muscles, its military capacity, its association with Congolese regime and above all its support from some countries in this region as well as some foreign countries in Europe.

For the past two decades, FDLR has transformed itself into a strong and well structured army as well as political organization that among other things still believe that genocide was just another collateral damages, which could happen anywhere where there’s war. To put things into perspective, FDLR doesn’t deny genocide against ‘Inyenzi’, a Kinyarwanda word for cockroaches.

“That was the cost of war…many people died but unfortunately the Hutus are not mentioned, we hear only one side of the story.” One of the FDLR officials told me in Nairobi, early in July, this year. The official who has been actively supporting the movement added, “It may takes us many years but one day we shall be back to business through true democracy or the barrel of gun.”

FDLR mission is to topple the current Kigali regime by all means. To them it’s just a matter of time, before they install the Hutu regime that was destroyed in 1994.

During my investigation, which among other things involved reviewing various literatures, interviewing ex-FDLR soldiers, and some analysts who have closely studied the organization, I came to a conclusion that FDLR in Congo is a government within a government.

The details gathered during my investigation show that the FDLR has assumed control over local markets, sometimes in conjunction with Congo’s army (FARDC) and police. In some parts of Fizi, an estimated 35 percent of market revenues accrue to the FDLR, which in return provide protection. In other areas, for example Mwenga and parts of Shabunda, they pocket all market fees.

The FDLR has autonomous socio-cultural structures in the regions under its control. There are FDLR-run churches, cemeteries, schools for their children, video movie cinemas and football teams. There are also traditional healers and theatrical groups among their numbers. Moreover, wedding ceremonies are organised, although it should be noted that they have the habit of marrying young women they bring over from Rwanda.

Léon Bariyanga, president of the provincial parliament of North Kivu says: “In Rutshuru, members of the FDLR look after security…They distribute land to the population. They exploit charcoal. They even demand that the roadblock from Kibati that is supposed to prevent exploitation of charcoal in the national park of Virunga be lifted, and threaten to take revenge on the population if their access to this important resource continues to be refused!”

In Walikale, as in other parts of the country, all those resisting the FDLR’s laws are abused and must flee from their villages. Armed Congolese groups can control some localities in this district if they are ready to work with the FDLR. Not even the police and the FARDC can move on roads controlled by the FDLR without their permission.

In South Kivu the FDLR have created military and civilian authorities as well as new administrative units, named after Rwandan cities.

To secure their survival and logistics, the FDLR exploit diverse natural and human resources in the areas they occupy. These include: exploitation of gold mines in South Kivu; of tin ore (cassiterite) in Walikale in North Kivu and trade with these minerals; transport of people and goods; slaughter and sale of animals stolen in Masisi in markets in Walikale and some countries in this region as well as some foreign countries in Europe.
elsewhere; trade with finished products – especially beer – and transportation of these between Hombo and Walikale.

“You have to ask yourself if their profits from these economic activities in Congo haven’t overshadowed their military and political struggle,” says Pole Institute manager Aloys Tegera. Since 2004 every Congolese with an age above 17-year old in FDLR controlled territory must pay a tax of $10, known as “fee for the liberation of Rwanda”.

According to details gathered by The Citizen, in addition, the FDLR controls local markets, sometimes together with the FARDC and the Congolese police. The FDLR works closely together with the 85th brigade of the Congolese Colonel Samy in the mining and sale of cassiterite. For whoever controls the cassiterite has the heart of the economy of the southern part of North Kivu in their hands.

The UN’s group of experts report of 2009, thoroughly reviewed during my investigation, confirms that armed groups, in particular the FDLR, earn close to $50 million (Sh83billion) revenues each year from the illegal trade in minerals, timbers, charcoals and other means. FDLR use part of this money to bankroll its military operations in Eastern Congo.

The DRC senate report – also published in September 2009 – estimated that 40 tons, or $1.24 billion of gold, nearly the same amount the UN ‘military adventure’ costs yearly, is smuggled out of the country each year. The FDLR controls the main road that links Bukavu with Shabunda as well as all tracks leading into the interior of the province. Visible and well structured, its combatants are stationed within a radius of 100 km.

According to Mr Ndahiro, except for those who enrich themselves in illegal ways (pillaging, extortion, even murder), the majority of the FDLR fighters trade minerals, cattle, goats and poultry to make a living. At the same time, they engage in mining. Frequently they carry out their business with the help of Congolese accomplices based in the towns or even in neighbouring countries.

To collect funds for their own needs, the FDLR has established a system of revenue collection, which includes toll collection points and road blocks in Kishatu (Kabare), Lubimbe (Walungu), Nyalulemba, Kirubili, Ngolombe, Isezya, Lutika and Kiluma in Shabunda territory on the road from Bukavu to Kigulube.

In each mining pit they collect weekly taxes, in the form of minerals (2 g of gold or 2 kg of coltan, cassiterite, tourmaline or amethyst for each gallery). - They charge a fee of $20 per cow and $2 per goat, pig or mutton that crosses FDLR-controlled areas. - They receive daily supplies of food and firewood that the local chief collects from the local community.

“FDLR exploits Congo’s natural resources as well as its people, but since the communities in the Eastern part of the country have no choice, they have accepted all these injustices done.” Mr Ndahiro says in his report obtained during my investigation.

“Given the silence of the Congolese state’s political, administrative and military authorities, local residents cannot help but wonder if the national and international community is actually aware of the things that happen in this part of the country and if the extortions and abuses will ever end.” Mr Ndahiro adds.

The relationship between the FDLR and the local Congolese population is reminiscent of that between master and slaves. The Congolese have little choice but to pay mandatory levies on the agricultural products they produce; they do not move freely for fear of sexual violence and assaults on the road etc. Finally, the Congolese are conscripted to clean the military camps of the FDLR at least once a week. On the military level, key demands of the FDLR include the return to Rwanda and their integration into the national army, commensurate with their military ranks.

Politically speaking, they call for a collective amnesty because, they say, “in Rwanda, everyone has committed killings and everybody has been killed.” They also demand an inter-Rwandan dialogue, similar to the one that was held in the DR Congo.

Finally, they claim that the Congolese state should compensate them for the crucial support they lent Congo’s army during the successive wars under Kabila, father and son.