



Thursday, 27 November 2008

PRESS RELEASE

Assembly debates North Kivu conflict escalation fears

Directorate-General for Communication
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Debate: 27.11.2008

Assembly debates North Kivu conflict escalation fears

Fears that the North Kivu conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo could escalate throughout the Great Lakes region, calls for a European peacekeeping force, and control of Congolese mineral resources were debated by the ACP-EU Assembly on 27 November with EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel.

The direct or indirect involvement of several countries in the Great Lakes region had prompted fears that the Congolese conflict could escalate into a "regional war", said EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel.

"Angola respects the DRC's sovereignty and territorial integrity, but wants to ensure stability in the region. If necessary, it would act to prevent conflict spiralling out of control and prevent a humanitarian disaster", said Mr De Sousa (Angola).

Keep calm, Angola

"The best thing that Angola can do is to remain calm", replied the Commissioner, who saw "no justification for Angolan intervention in the DRC".

Rwanda echoed the Commissioner's rejoinder, and observed that the DRC has a twofold problem: the Interahamwe (a Hutu group involved in the Rwanda genocide of 1994), "which rapes and pillages, and bad governance, which fosters corruption and the illegal exploitation of mines".

"It is high time to put in place a genuinely neutral international force to eradicate the FDLR" (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) said Christophe Lutundula (DRC), adding that the Mission of the United Nations to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) could provide the core of this force.

Johan Van Hecke (ALDE, BE) felt that Laurent Nkunda should be prosecuted in the International Criminal Court, but admitted that "unless DRC's structural problems are solved, he would simply be replaced by another Nkunda".

Minerals

"We need a political solution that leads to lasting peace" said Alain Hutchinson (PES, BE), adding that "it would be too easy for the international community to dismiss this as an 'ethnic conflict', when it in fact it "has responsibilities" in DRC.

The Congolese forces' control of mines producing valuable minerals such as gold, diamonds and coltan (used to make high-tech equipment including mobile phones and portable computers) "justifies the presence of MONUC" (Mission of the United Nations to the Democratic Republic of the Congo), he continued, noting that "but for these minerals, there would be no war".

A European buffer force?

Replying to a question from Jürgen Schröder (EPP-ED, DE) about whether a European force could be deployed to disarm the FDLR, Commissioner Michel said there was no political will among EU states to send an EU force.

The MONUC, should be increased by 3,000 men, including a substantial Indian unit, to 20,000, he said.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/60_16/default_en.htm

Link to website of the ACP/EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly

Further information:

Andrew Boreham

Press Service

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

Mob. + 352 661 430055

Tel.: +675 323 88 75

e-mail: andrew.boreham@europarl.europa.eu