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INTENSE INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICT IN KASAI; FIGHTING SPREADS TO FORMER KATANGA

Latest update: 23/05/2017

PROBABILITY



OUTLOOK FOR MAY–OCTOBER 2017

Current no. affected: 2.4 million

Expected no. affected: At least 300,000 newly affected people

Attacks by the Kamuina Nsapu militia on state institutions began in Kasai-Central, but spread to Kasai, Kasai-Oriental, and some areas of Lomami and Sankuru [\[? www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/kamuina-nsapu-insurgency-adds-dangers-dr-congo\]](http://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/kamuina-nsapu-insurgency-adds-dangers-dr-congo), resulting in at least 400 deaths, including many civilians; over 2.4 million affected; and 1.3 million internally displaced as of 12 May 2017 [\[? www.iom.int/news/dr-congo-kasai-emergency-response-benefits-initial-un-migration-agency-funding\]](http://www.iom.int/news/dr-congo-kasai-emergency-response-benefits-initial-un-migration-agency-funding) [\[? www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_05052017_fr.pdf\]](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_05052017_fr.pdf). The conflict has evolved and is at risk of both spreading as well as shifting into more inter-ethnic fighting.

Context

Since mid-2016 violence escalated in the Kasai region following the refusal of the central authorities to recognise Jean-Pierre Mpandi as hereditary chief ('Kamuina Nsapu') of the Bajila Kasanga chieftaincy in Kasai-Central, mainly because he did not support the presidential majority. Despite the position being officially apolitical, authorities often compel chiefs to align with the government [\[? www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/kamuina-nsapu-insurgency-adds-dangers-dr-congo\]](http://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/kamuina-nsapu-insurgency-adds-dangers-dr-congo).

Drivers of the Kamuina Nsapu insurgency

In 2015, the central government divided Kasai region into five provinces, undermining the local power of the chieftaincy, and leading to the deterioration of the relationship between the chieftaincy and the central government and provincial authorities. From April 2016, the increase of security forces to assert control in the area led to further tensions, with Mpandi protesting the harassment of his people, the Bajila Kasanga tribe [\[? www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/kamuina-nsapu-insurgency-adds-dangers-dr-congo\]](http://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/kamuina-nsapu-insurgency-adds-dangers-dr-congo). On 12 August 2016, the FARDC state military forces killed Mpandi in fighting. Since his death, his followers have sought revenge, and continue to fight for more local power in the Kasai regions.

The situation in Kasai also reflects wider popular frustrations. People living in Kasai have long complained of political and socio-economic neglect by the authorities because it is an opposition stronghold with political figures such as Etienne Tshisekedi of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS). The Kamuina Nsapu militia is exploiting the national-level political conflict to further undermine the already weak legitimacy of local institutions. In addition to its more local demands, it has called for rapid implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement on political transition and national elections [\[? www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/kamuina-nsapu-insurgency-adds-dangers-dr-congo\]](http://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/kamuina-nsapu-insurgency-adds-dangers-dr-congo). The national electoral commission (CENI) has been targeted, as have religious institutions, because they are involved in mediating the political transition process. However, the attacks on the electoral commission have only succeeded in further delaying any progress towards elections [\[? www.radiookapi.net/2017/03/14/actualite/secureite/kasai-central-les-miliciens-kamuina-nsapu-ont-vandalise-les-bureaux-de\]](http://www.radiookapi.net/2017/03/14/actualite/secureite/kasai-central-les-miliciens-kamuina-nsapu-ont-vandalise-les-bureaux-de) [\[? www.radiookapi.net/2017/05/09/emissions/parole-aux-auditeurs/enrolement-des-electeurs-quelle-solution-pour-les-kasai\]](http://www.radiookapi.net/2017/05/09/emissions/parole-aux-auditeurs/enrolement-des-electeurs-quelle-solution-pour-les-kasai). The opposition has played no overt role in addressing the conflict in Kasai.

Factions within Kamuina Nsapu militia

One of the key demands of the Kamuina Nsapu insurgency was for the return of Mpandi's body. While efforts by national and provincial authorities to address the grievances of Mpandi's family have led some militia to lay down their weapons, others have continued to commit violence. The militia is now split between parties calling for peace and others calling to continue the fight against state institutions. The militia does not have a strong central command, but is made up of several dozen relatively autonomous groups with differing agendas [\[? www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_DRC_Kasai_Crisis_17_April_2017.pdf\]](http://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_DRC_Kasai_Crisis_17_April_2017.pdf).

Ethnic dimension of the conflict

Conflict is developing beyond political grievances and taking on an ethnic dimension, pitting groups who consider themselves as native to the region (Tchokwe and Pende - mostly from the south of the Kasai provinces) against those they describe as non-natives (Lulua and Luba, who are closely related).

Non-natives are being portrayed as a threat to local security and livelihoods. This stems partly from the fact that Luba make up a large number of the Kamuina Nsapu and that Mpandi was a Luba [\[? www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/03/26/congolese-rebels-behead-42-police-officers-in-dramatic-escalation-of-conflict/?utm_term=.3138211e8f5a\]](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/03/26/congolese-rebels-behead-42-police-officers-in-dramatic-escalation-of-conflict/?utm_term=.3138211e8f5a). After Kamuina Nsapu began its insurgency, local 'self-defence' militias were set up to

ensure security against attacks from Kamuina Nsapu. The conflict then shifted to more ethnic-based fighting. Luba and Lulua are being targeted not only for supporting or having supported the Kamuina Nsapu insurgency, but also for not originating from southern Kasai. This has happened in Kamonia in Kasai and in Luilu and Kamij in Lomami [\[?\]](#)
www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_05052017_fr.pdf [\[?\]](#)
www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_DRC_Kasai_Crisis_17_April_2017.pdf. So far the inter-ethnic violence has mainly affected south and central Kasai and south Lomami, but in April there were signs of intercommunal violence in Luiza and Lazumba, Kasai-Central and Ngandajika, Lomami [\[?\]](#)
www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_DRC_Kasai_Crisis_17_April_2017.pdf [\[?\]](#)
reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_03042017.pdf.

This pattern is similar to events in neighbouring Katanga in the 1990s, where conflict broke out over political disagreements, and Luba were perceived to be opposed to Mobutu's government and allied to Tshisekedi. However, the rhetoric soon took on a more ethnic dimension, with opposition to the Luba being based on their not being 'native' to Katanga. This resulted in the forced displacement of almost 1.4 million people and at least 5,000 Luba killed [\[? d2071andvip0wi.cloudfront.net/katanga-the-congo-s-forgotten-crisis-french.pdf\]](http://d2071andvip0wi.cloudfront.net/katanga-the-congo-s-forgotten-crisis-french.pdf).

PREDICTED DEVELOPMENTS

Luba and Lulua groups are particularly at risk

Within Kasai, inter-ethnic tensions are quite likely to escalate and become the main driver of increased violence between armed groups, primarily in southern Kasai. In the territories of Kasai, Kasai Central, and Lomami, where Lulua and Luba are in the minority, there will be a heightened risk of killings and forced displacement. Little action to calm the situation is expected from politicians - even leaders of the opposition - in this opposition stronghold.

Given the loose affiliation and command structure of the Kamuina Nsapu militia, members are likely to increasingly use political grievances as a pretext for violence, and will engage in more extortion, raids, and other opportunistic criminal activities. Violence is likely to spread to the former Katanga province. While the government has control over several key mining sites in Haut-Katanga, south of Lualaba and Tanganyika provinces of Katanga, making violence there less likely, it is likely that northern parts of Lualaba and Haut-Lomami provinces will experience violence.

Violence will continue and further spread to parts of neighbouring former Katanga region

IMPACT



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Increased cross-border movement to Angola can be expected, suggested by recent arrival trends and the location of ethnic violence in southern Kasai: 20,000 of the 33,400 DRC refugees in Angola have arrived since April 2017 [\[?\]](#)
reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Angola%20Emergency%20Update%20-%208MAY17.pdf.



Access to basic healthcare services will be disrupted due to conflict. Risk of communicable disease is already on the rise due to the interruption of vaccination campaigns in Kasai-Central [\[? www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/weekly_update_01may2017.pdf\]](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/weekly_update_01may2017.pdf). Poor living conditions among IDPs will increase the risk of a disease outbreak.

Needs are already high: in Kasai-Central, one in three health centres are no longer functional [\[? www.unicef.org/media/media_95825.html\]](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_95825.html). 12 out of 26 health zones in Kasai-Central cannot be supplied with basic medicines, compared to 9 in January and 3 in October [\[?\]](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_19042017_en.pdf)
www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_19042017_en.pdf.



Human rights abuses, such as kidnapping and executions, are likely to be widespread, and committed by all parties. At least 40 mass graves have already been found [\[? www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/04/20/rdc-l-onu-annonce-la-decouverte-de-dix-sept-nouvelles-fosses-communes-au-kasai_5114169_3212.html\]](http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/04/20/rdc-l-onu-annonce-la-decouverte-de-dix-sept-nouvelles-fosses-communes-au-kasai_5114169_3212.html).

More children will be recruited by militia: some 2,000 children have been recruited since August 2016 [\[? www.unicef.org/media/media_95825.html\]](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_95825.html).



Access to newly affected areas will be limited. Already, seven territories in the five conflict-affected provinces are not accessible [\[?\]](#)
www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_12042017_en.pdf. Deployment of FARDC troops will prevent

returns and delay the implementation of response [\[](#)
www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_05052017_fr.pdf]



The nutrition situation will deteriorate among people newly affected by fighting. Kasai-Oriental has reported SAM levels over the emergency threshold. SAM treatment is unlikely to be adequate [\[](#)
reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20DR%20Congo%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report-%20January_March%202017.pdf] [\[](#)
www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_05052017_fr.pdf]



WASH situation will be impacted as fighting spreads - people displaced to the bush will likely lack access to safe water or adequate sanitation [\[](#)
www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/echo_crisis_flash_no.2_rdc_kasai_complex_emergency.pdf]



Displacement hinders farming and strains resources. Food security will deteriorate as the crisis impacts the harvest and food availability [\[](#)
www.fews.net/southern-africa/democratic-republic-congo/key-message-update/march-2017]. Market access will be further disrupted as insecurity spreads. Increased main staple food prices have already been reported [\[](#) documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp291645.pdf]



Ethnic-related violence increases the risk of shelter damage, as fighters try to prevent returns to areas of origin. Shelters have already been looted and burned down [\[](#) www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_05052017_fr.pdf]



Education will be further disrupted. In Kasai-Central, final exams could not take place in May in 15 out of 72 education centres due to insecurity [\[](#)
www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_05052017_fr.pdf] (
[OCHA 05/05/2017](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_05052017_fr.pdf)
https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ocha_drc_kasais_situationreport_05052017_fr.pdf
). Kamuina Nsapu militia have targeted schools in protest at high fees.