

Congo**Stop paying for murder**

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Cut off Western aid to Rwanda and Congo until their governments stop sponsoring murderous proxy militias

AFP



VIOLENT conflict in eastern Congo has killed thousands more people in the past three months and made more than 250,000 homeless. With disease rampant and hunger spreading, this is a humanitarian disaster comparable to that in Sudan's Darfur region or in Somalia. Europe and America have condemned the slaughter but have stumbled over how to stop it. They now have reason to try a lot harder.

A United Nations report published last week has stripped away some of the myths surrounding the fighting in Congo's eastern provinces of North and South Kivu and exposed its underlying causes. It shows how the war is largely a proxy fight between rival militias that are being armed and encouraged by Rwanda's government and by Congo's. The evidence set out includes photocopies of e-mails, letters and legal documents. Most damningly, the report lays bare the intimate links between the National Congress for the Defence of the People, known by its French abbreviation CNDP, a Congolese Tutsi militia led by General Laurent Nkunda (pictured left), and the Rwandan government led by another Tutsi, President Paul Kagame (pictured right). It says that "the Rwandan authorities have been complicit in the recruitment of soldiers, including children, have facilitated the supply of military equipment, and have sent officers and units from the Rwandan Defence Forces to [Congo] in support of CNDP."

Since the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, when Hutu extremists killed about 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in little more than three months, Rwanda has often intervened in Congo, arguing that it has done so to protect Congolese Tutsis and to hunt down those Hutus responsible for the genocide. This has evoked the sympathy of foreigners, particularly in the United States and Britain, who have chosen not to examine Rwanda's actions in Congo too closely.

The UN report makes it impossible for them to look away. Rwanda's support for the CNDP is fuelling much of the violence. General Nkunda deserves to be in the dock at The Hague for war crimes. The report also shows

that both General Nkunda's lot and the main Congolese-backed Hutu militia, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, have links with mining companies. Both extort large sums of money from mines they control. They also do illegal mining, from which Rwanda profits as well. The booty helps pay the militias to fight, giving them good reason to carry on the conflict.

Co-operate or lose your cash

The UN maintains its biggest peacekeeping force in the world in Congo, 17,000 strong, but has struggled to impose order on chaotic North and South Kivu. The force should be beefed up, at least temporarily, with fresh soldiers from European Union countries, as the UN's secretary-general has requested. But new troops can deal only with the symptoms of the conflict. The UN report gives foreign governments the authority to tackle its roots. That is best done by putting pressure on both Rwanda's Mr Kagame and on his Congolese counterpart to rein in the proxy fighters and honour peace agreements signed nearly a year ago.

Outsiders have powerful levers. Rwanda's government, in particular, depends heavily on Western aid; in the past five years it has received more than \$1.6 billion. That should stop until Mr Kagame starts to restrain General Nkunda and his militia. The Dutch and Swedes have given a lead, cancelling their aid to Rwanda in protest against its government's backing of the murderous general. Other governments, notably Britain's, which is Rwanda's single biggest backer, should do likewise until Mr Kagame changes his ways.