

TRAGEDY IN BENI: A CRISIS FORETOLD?

A PEACE DIRECT BRIEFING FOLLOWING THE AUGUST 2016 MASSACRE IN DR CONGO

In August, at least 42 civilians were hacked to death with machetes in Beni, Eastern DRC. It was not the first time such violence has taken place, and it may not be the last. How can the killing be stopped? This briefing is based on recommendations from a series of civil society meetings in Beni, facilitated by Peace Direct, designed to identify further capacity for peacebuilding and set priorities for local action.



The Congolese army on patrol in North Kivu Province. The perpetrators of August's massacre in Beni remain unknown, but Congo's trouble with armed groups is well-documented. Image credit: [MONUSCO](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Local civil society identified key activities that should take place following the recent massacres in Beni:

1. **Organize public dialogues led by the local authorities and civil society to speak out against violence and mob justice that can incite further violence, massacres and ethnic tensions.**
2. **Conduct urgent and intensive sensitization of the population for peaceful co-existence and constructive responses at this difficult time.**
3. **Organize confidence building sessions between MONUSCO and the population through civil society.**
4. **Establish an early warning network to strengthen security and mitigate atrocities.**
5. **Supervise disaffected youth and expedite plans to demobilize and reintegrate armed groups into their communities.**

A cross-cutting issue that is needed for the above to be effective is **to increase peacebuilding capacity in Beni** through investments in civil society, with the following recommendations:

International donors and NGOs: Strengthen the capacity of local peacebuilders to carry out their work.

There are many local individuals and organisations in Beni identified as assets for peace. Yet there is no co-ordination mechanism for peacebuilding, and local actors are under-supported. Small investments to co-ordinate local capacities will be meaningful and cost-effective.

Congolese government: Define clear and specific actions to involve local peacebuilding organizations in its strategy for Eastern Congo.

The government should help local organizations to formalize their legal status, conduct an audit of existing capacity, and incorporate organizations representing local communities into key forums. This should include the Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan for Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The government must also ensure the protection of human rights defenders, who are particularly at risk.

MONUSCO: Make Beni a priority zone for the International Security and Stabilization Strategy (I4S) and prepare the Democratic Dialogue pillar in advance.

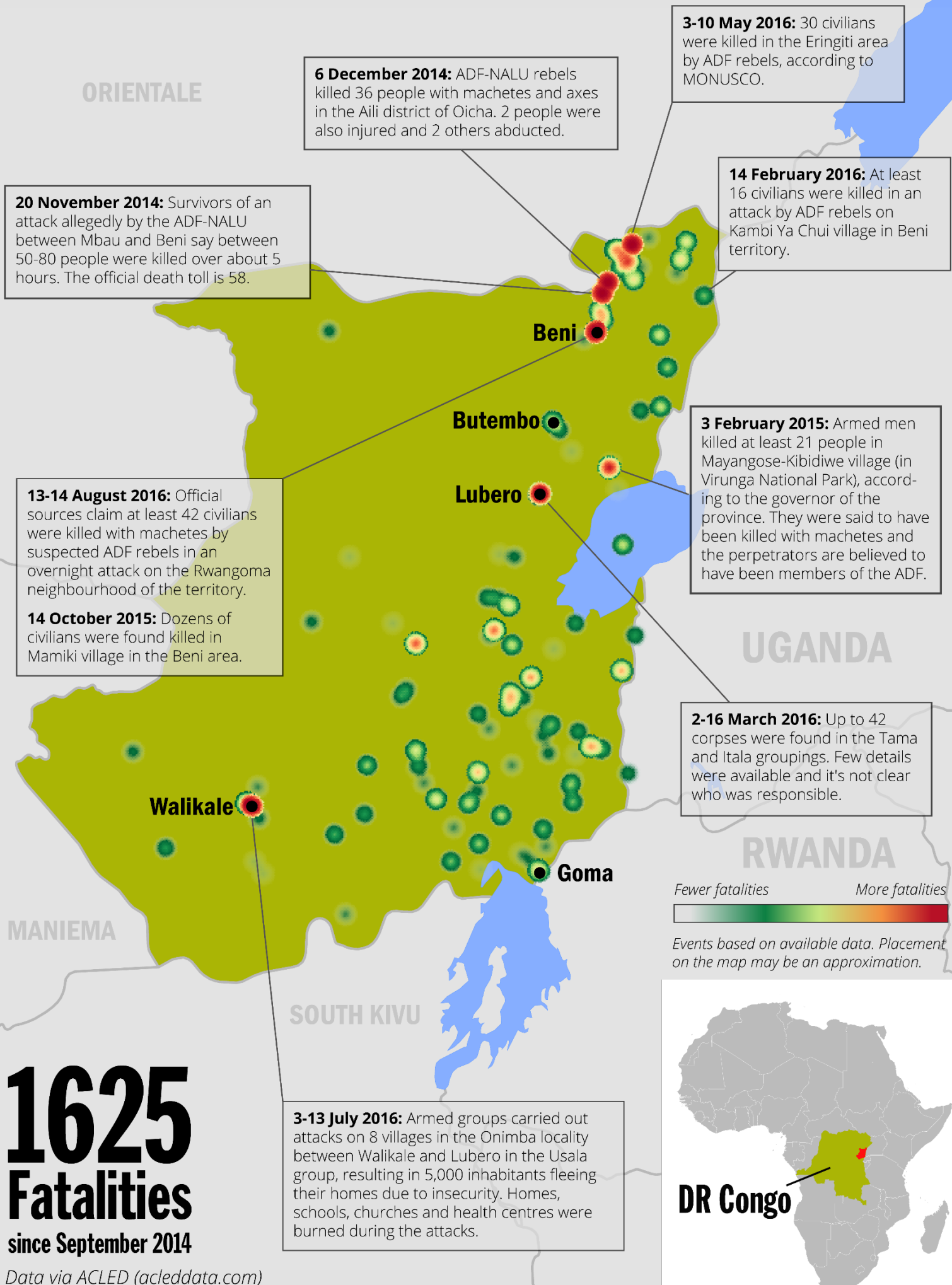
Beni should become an I4S priority zone quickly. Time must be given to local leaders to develop their engagement with the I4S, properly sequencing the "democratic dialogue" pillar as its starting point. This requires investments in civil society like the Beni Peace Forum.

Civil society in Beni: Immediately begin organizing and developing joint activities to demonstrate impact.

Civil society in Beni understands concerns about integrity and transparency, but rejects the assumption that all civil society is untrustworthy and that local peacebuilding cannot be scaled up. Civil society should see Beni's current exclusion from the I4S as an opportunity to prepare itself to better influence the international community.

KILLING IN THE CONGO: THE RECENT HISTORY OF VIOLENCE IN NORTH KIVU

Selected violent events during the last 24 months.



In spring and summer 2016, Peace Direct convened 60 representatives of local peacebuilding organisations as part of a new Beni Peace Forum. They identified key factors to take into account when supporting local peace actors.

“They hacked him and put him in a pigsty,” a survivor told [Al Jazeera](#). This terrifying report emerged from an attack by an armed group on the town of Beni, Eastern DRC, on Saturday 13 August. It is not the first time Beni has been targeted. Scores of people have died in several different atrocities in 2016 alone, and at least 1625 people have been killed in the North Kivu region during the last 24 months.¹

This briefing is based on recommendations from a series of civil society-led workshops held in Beni in March-August 2016, in response to this violence. The killings take place amid ongoing instability and endemic armed conflict in the Great Lakes region of central Africa. Research indicates that several cross-border networks of armed groups may be responsible – and many pin the blame on rebel groups with reported connections to Uganda – but it is a complex and shifting picture.

The only certainty is that for far too long, violence has continued: the latest massacre was a predictable event in the context of patterns of conflict in this part of Eastern DRC. But this does not mean that nothing can be done. Peace Direct has spent more than a decade supporting

local peacebuilders in Eastern DRC, with notable success in rescuing and reintegrating child soldiers from the type of groups involved in the Beni attacks. Peace Direct has also advocated for the integration of a civil society strategy into the I4S, which attempts to co-ordinate much of the international community.

The impetus for this is local, and timely. In early 2016, one of our local partner organizations was approached by a key civil society figure in Beni Town, whose communities were requesting a meeting to discuss why Beni was suffering a disproportionate number of massacres compared with other areas of DRC.

In response, Peace Direct facilitated a series of consultations with a number of local organisations as part of a developing ‘Beni Peace Forum’. These were designed to identify further capacity for peacebuilding and set priorities for local action. These steps can contribute to local peacebuilders better influencing events. This will not be quick or easy, but we know that there is enormous potential within already-existing civil society to mitigate, respond to and ultimately prevent further atrocities.

Preventing more atrocities: civil society recommendations

Peace Direct’s consultations identified a number of specific actions to support local peacebuilders in Beni. This is what they say needs to happen to stop the violence:

ONE: The international community should strengthen the capacity of individual local organizations to prevent and respond to violence.

The Beni consultations identified a range of individuals, institutions, organisations and informal networks that can contribute to peacebuilding in Beni. The consultations also highlighted successful locally led interventions, the most successful of which were when multiple-stakeholders, including the government, worked together. Yet there is no co-ordination mechanism in Beni for peacebuilding. While mapping exercises have highlighted local actors (for one such exercise, see [Insight on Conflict](#)), many actors still lack

the organisational capacity and management systems to implement appropriate activities at the scale needed; training in organisational development would be particularly welcome. Relevant projects that could be supported were identified: community monitoring and awareness-raising through radio broadcasts and cultural activities, joint civil-military activities to strengthen the basis for long-term cooperation, and electoral and civic education in Beni to reduce the risk of political manipulation. Especially in light of the upcoming and already contentious elections, the risk of vigilante justice and revenge killings is high, so social dialogue is of the utmost importance. Small grants or in-kind support can have a huge impact in the context of voluntary and informal organisations, but international actors must

¹ September 2014 – August 2016. Data via [ACLED](#).

commit to identifying and working with local groups, starting on a small scale if necessary.

TWO: Local organizations should organise and initiate joint activities to scale up their own work and demonstrate credibility to the international community.

Although now is not the time for the international community to lose faith in local peacebuilding, it is also not feasible to expect the donor community immediately to start providing large, direct grants to small, local organizations. Congolese civil society rejects the assumption that all local organizations are poorly managed, but it recognizes the need to allay the legitimate concerns of donors. The Beni Peace Forum should demonstrate its commitment to integrity and transparency by adopting best practices. This should be accompanied by long-term capacity support, joint advocacy to obtain relevant legal documentation and engage with the Congolese authorities, and the identification of more organisations capable of participating in the peacebuilding forum.

To improve peacebuilding collaboration across civil society, one meaningful step would be the instigation of information-sharing and other initiatives to pool resources and demonstrate the capacity of local organizations to organise and scale up their impact. Significantly, this should include an Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) network in Beni which can prepare the forum to implement organised responses to conflict dynamics. Peace Direct's experience with the locally-led INAMA EWER in [Burundi](#) shows that it is possible to harness the capacity of local organizations to provide unparalleled insight into the dynamics of violence. A 2015 survey indicated widespread interest from the international community in a similar system in Eastern DRC, where Peace Direct has mapped [early warning operations](#). But these groups are ad hoc, inconsistent and do not share information with either local organizations or the civilian or protection units of the UN. Reliable information sharing between civil society would provide communities with an effective system to monitor conflict indicators and incidents, including the movement of armed groups, and allow for the targeted allocation of resources to support peacebuilding activities.

THREE: The Congolese government should incorporate local voices into its decision making, make Beni a priority zone in its Eastern Congo strategy, and work to ensure the protection of human rights defenders.

The Congolese government must demonstrate its commitment to the people of Beni. It should support local peacebuilding organisations seeking to establish themselves as formal legal entities, conduct an audit of local capacity as the basis for further engagement, and in doing so identify key Beni peace actors and ensure their presence in discussions on national and international strategy development for Eastern DRC. In particular, this should include decision-making on funding channelled through the government's Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan for Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The government should also develop a strategy to help protect human rights defenders, who are particularly at risk precisely because their work is seen as a threat by armed groups whose activity they are trying to end.

FOUR: MONUSCO should commit to developing a strategy to support collaboration between civil society organizations and better sequence the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (I4S).

The I4S has not selected Beni as a priority zone, but Peace Direct's conversations with MONUSCO's Stabilization Support Unit indicate that there is an opportunity for local partners to become more involved with and supported by the international peacekeeping mission. Any assessment of Beni in preparation for the I4S must consider existing local capacities and prioritise the development of a localized civil society strategy. This should be linked to the 'Democratic Dialogue' pillar of the I4S which will enable the bottom-up coordination of the international community. It is important that the Democratic Dialogue pillar is given enough time to inform all other I4S pillars *before* embarking on large scale funding, ensuring local actors have had the time and space to inform and pre-empt any future funding decisions. This way, Beni will see the proper sequencing of the I4S pillars, with the Democratic Dialogue pillar able to lead, therefore moving much more firmly to the bottom-up co-ordination of local, national and international resources.

Keys to success in local peacebuilding

Based on Peace Direct's work in DRC and elsewhere in the world, the following should be considered when scaling up local peacebuilding:

There needs to be an exit strategy:

A mechanism for the gradual phasing out of the international community must exist for any support to local organisations. This does not mean that INGOs should not be involved in the long-term, but that project assistance should be delivered in the context of strengthening the ability of community groups to design and implement their own work. In Beni, it is expected that help from INGOs will be welcome, and there may always be a desire for some outside backing, especially when it comes to financial, technical or material provisions. What is important is that INGOs seek to reduce their direct involvement and facilitate the success and recognition of local actors from a distance.

Support should be situation-specific:

The obstacles to peace in Beni are many and complex. They may seem too numerous to be meaningfully addressed in any one project, but if they can be identified, they can be responded to. The research for this paper identified a variety of relevant issues, including but not limited to: a crisis of confidence

Stakeholder interview:

"Massacres have been taking place in Beni for more than a year and a half. They are rarely claimed by any one group, although the Congolese army regularly announces operations against the Ugandan ADF rebel group, who are suspected of taking part in the killing. But others ask why the military operation is taking so long. Supporting civil society to help build peace could have a big impact in the area. This could include supporting local media in their peace campaigns, helping civil society organisations to establish coordination mechanisms, and developing their strategic planning ability. For its part, civil society needs to ensure the inclusion of all points of view, and to define specific advocacy work for each level of authority in Eastern DRC. Local leaders will be vital. The local leader in my area is a courageous man and a key figure in Beni – listened to, respected, and neutral. He wants peace."

A local peacebuilder

between the local population and the security services; the lack of clear distinctions between civilian and military roles; restrictions on the freedom of expression and movement of human rights defenders; a generally poor information environment, giving rise to dangerous rumours; the lack of a shared civil society vision; and the potential for political manipulation of local actors, including some peacebuilding actors. These need to be understood and taken into consideration when working on civil society responses to violence in Beni.

The full range of civil society should be mobilised:

There is a huge variety of civil society peacebuilders in Beni, although they may not use the term themselves. The stakeholder mapping conducted for this brief identified numerous individuals, societies, and formal and informal organizations working on conflict and security issues in the region. Their knowledge, skills and experience needs to be harnessed. Although it may not be possible to incorporate them all into formal project work, they all have a stake in peace, and their role will be indispensable to ensuring political buy-in, raising community awareness and support, and coordinating disparate social groups. This is what will ultimately bring lasting peace to Beni.

Support to local actors should be phased:

Incremental delivery of support is important for nascent local collaborations, in order to manage the tensions that may emerge as increased resources reach local actors. There are governance risks attached to significant external funding if management procedures are not developed concurrently. But a gradual introduction of funding, coupled with initial preparation, capacity building and management transparency, can help identify tensions early and work to resolve them. For this reason, funding should be disbursed over time.

Communications must build confidence in local peacebuilding:

The local peacebuilding sector in Beni does not have a communication strategy, limiting its ability to change the

attitudes of policy makers, donors and local communities. This is unfortunate, as Beni-based actors have a lot to offer, both in terms of informing the international community and government of what can and is being achieved through local peacebuilding, and in engendering confidence in the viability of local peace efforts among communities. More needs to be done to highlight the work they are doing and to communicate this to stakeholders. Consideration should be given to common misperceptions of the sector in Beni which inhibit confidence (for example, that peacebuilding is small scale, that civil society lacks integrity, that there is a lack of knowledge of who does what, and that stability is a pre-requisite for peacebuilding activities).

Monitoring and evaluation should consider the peacebuilding infrastructure itself:

Despite frequent references to 'locally led' approaches in peacebuilding, it is difficult to know if these are supporting genuinely empowered local leadership. A key part of meaningful support to local actors includes context-specific monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. In Beni, this means enabling the Beni Peace Forum to analyse not only its peacebuilding activities but also the local ownership, development and neutrality of the network structure itself. This will build trust and support in its long-term development as a key peace actor.

Next steps to implement a Beni civil society strategy

Key activities to develop this work and build peace in Beni

Civil society should prepare for engagement with the international community:

It is important that civil society is prepared in advance of substantive international engagement, the most likely opportunity being the prioritization of Beni by the I4S. The Beni Peace Forum should be supported to continue its work to better organise local actors and increase their impact on peacebuilding. This will also prepare civil society to better engage the Democratic Dialogue pillar of the I4S, allowing more time for it to inform all other pillars *before* it embarks on large scale funding. This way, Beni will be better prepared to ensure the proper sequencing of the I4S, informed by existing local capacity and best practice.

In addition, civil society should assess potential international partners in advance of any potential funding consortiums. This will help to empower civil society within expected funding consortiums, which tend to be dominated by international actors.

Develop a local EWER system for Beni:

Alongside the development of strategies to inform the I4S pillars, the Beni Peace Forum needs to be supported to better utilize and share the information it is able to generate from its local networks. Peace Direct intends to use its experience with [INAMA](#) in Burundi to support this work, which will be a valuable conflict prevention initiative as well as a good exercise to strengthen the ability of the Beni Forum and others to work together.

“The local leader in my area is a courageous man and a key figure in Beni – listened to, respected, and neutral. He wants peace.”

ABOUT THIS BRIEFING

Peace Direct is an international NGO that works with local people to build a just world, free from violent conflict.

The information and recommendations in this report are based on a variety of sources. These include a literature review, a DRC-specific systems analysis, and workshops conducted by a local peacebuilding consultant in North Kivu in spring and summer 2016. The workshops included discussions with 60 representatives of local peacebuilding organisations, a stakeholder and actor analysis, and local capacity mapping. Research was also conducted by Peace Direct to map local [conflict early warning](#) capacity in Eastern DR Congo. The brief draws on Peace Direct's ten years of experience working with local peacebuilding organisations in North and South Kivu.

Peace Direct is available for further consultation on DRC. For more information, contact Tom Gillhespy at tom.gillhespy@peacedirect.org