

RIPPLES OF GENOCIDE

JOURNEY THROUGH EASTERN CONGO

Angelina Jolie, actress and Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and John Prendergast, senior adviser with the International Crisis Group, journeyed through the war-torn region of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in September 2003. This is the transcript of a composite "journal" from their trip. To see and hear the full journal, visit

[www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/
online/congojournal/](http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/congojournal/).



Introduction: Uganda

September 8, 2003

Angelina Jolie: While we are waiting for the plane to get fuel, Michel [Kassa, from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs] and I talk about the Congo. "What do you expect to see?" he asks. I tell him I have learned not to expect anything, not to think about it until I'm in it, because you're never prepared for what these places are really like. I want to meet the people, talk with them, and get a sense of the place. And hopefully from that, talking with the UN, the military and aid workers I can get an idea of what's going on and why.



JOHN PRENDERGAST: There is no place on earth like the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Congolese war is estimated to have taken over three million lives since 1996. No conflict since World War II has produced as many casualties.

Ripples from the genocide in Rwanda hit the Congo like a tidal wave. Rwandan officials and militia responsible for the genocide crossed into Congo in 1994. Their hostile presence led the postgenocide Rwandan government to invade Congo in 1996, igniting the first war, which overthrew the corrupt, despotic regime of Mobutu Sese Seko. A year of uneasy peace collapsed into full-scale war again in 1998. A number of neighboring countries piled into the fray, both for and against the government in Kinshasa, sparking what was known as Africa's first world war. Peace efforts have led to the creation of a transitional government composed of many of the

warring factions, but violence in the war-devastated eastern part of the country continues apace, much of it beneath the radar screen of the international community.

Congo's vast mineral wealth creates opportunities for plunder by greedy commercial actors, criminal networks, and powerful neighbors. The impact on a vulnerable population is all too reminiscent of the lives lost during Belgian King Leopold's deadly colonial project more than a century ago. For centuries Congo has been sliced and diced by its neighbors, by international commercial interests, and by its former colonial power. Outsiders and their local accomplices have sown confusion to destroy local administration, cohesion, and defenses. They have also aimed to displace people in order to reduce barriers to the extraction of minerals and the creation of spheres of authority. Belgian colonialists were replaced by Mobutuists, who were then replaced by Ugandans, Rwandans, Zimbabweans and elements from Kinshasa as the organizers of this feeding frenzy on Congolese resources.



Travel narration

(September 9, 2003)

Angelina Jolie: "Five minutes to wheels down." I focus out the window. It is so green. There are areas of thick dense green jungle. . . . I have been to so many different parts of Africa, but this is my first glimpse of Congo. It is stunning.

Displacement and Hunger: Bunia



Angelina Jolie: We stop at a displaced camp. These people came from Ituri in May. When the war broke out, they walked 120 kilometers. It is a sea of friendly, bold, and curious people. I am told the food rations are very limited here. As we walk, we are followed by many children.

An old man, Mazanaie, brings us into a hut to talk. It is made of mud with UN blue tarp as a roof. There are men and women in the hut. The women here are tough. Mothers here are respected. They tell their story: “Ten days in the forest crossing rivers and eating roots and guava. Here a man has let us live on his property. We have help from local NGOs [non-governmental organizations], but our biggest problem is food. We sleep on banana leaves and there are many mosquitoes.” They have had to leave everything—all their belongings, all their clothes. Some wear the same thing for a month.



JOHN PRENDERGAST: Mortality rates are high in eastern Congo because civilians are constantly being displaced by the unprecedented levels of violence. The country has one of the highest rates of displacement ever recorded. There are now nearly three and a half million displaced people as a result of war and associated

violence. The continuous rounds of displacement have resulted in a slow, steady impoverishment, and an erosion of the capacity to survive. Consequently, over three-quarters of Congo's population is malnourished. The combination of constant displacement, eroding nutrition, and no access to health care leads to a downward spiral in well-being that far too often ends in death, especially for children. Congo is rich and fertile and would not need outside assistance if the cycles of violence could be ended. People live on a razor's edge, as the disruption of planting cycles and marketing channels makes access to food tenuous. In many places in the east, families are lucky to eat one meal per day.

Travel narration



Angelina Jolie: Driving back to the plane, we pass about 30 militiamen in camouflage pants, without shirts, all of them with rifles. Back at the airport we have to rush. We must land in Goma before sunset at 5:30.

Child soldiers: Goma

Angelina Jolie: [At dinner.] We talk about child soldiers. "Many times the guns are taller than the kids. How they can shoot them without falling over, I don't know. But they do. They do kill. Many of the children are on drugs." The question is how to fight an enemy when he has covered himself with children, drugged them, and handed guns to them. Do you shoot at the kids? Ed [photographer]



says he had an 11-year-old girl point a gun at him once when he was taking a picture. She must have been told not to allow anyone to document the situation. There is a group of ex-child soldiers in Bunia, “demobilized” children. We will try to visit them tomorrow.



JOHN PRENDERGAST: Childhood is an abstract concept in many parts of Congo. Children are born into war; they are deeply affected by it, and they are often participants

in it. There are thousands of child soldiers in various armed groups in Congo today. Most were either forcibly recruited or joined because they and their families saw no alternative economic future. Nearly all of these children have experienced untold horrors, trauma that further complicates their return to civilian life.

Programs are just now being constructed that attempt to disarm, demobilize, rehabilitate, and reintegrate these former child soldiers. However, resources are constrained. Alternative economic opportunities are scarce, pressures to join or rejoin militias are often great, counseling services are erratic, local communities are often wary and sometimes hostile, and government or external agencies often can't deliver what they have promised. Escaping the cycles of violence in this context is a difficult proposition.

Repatriation and Rwanda: Goma

September 10, 2003

Angelina Jolie: The first stop this morning is the UNHCR office to meet with Rwandan refugees. The main activity here for UNHCR is repatriation of Rwandan refugees who have been in Congo since 1994. I sit with a couple and their small baby.



Someone who had already repatriated came back and told them it was safe. As we speak, all the others stand around us in a circle, listening.



I discover the lady is Congolese but her husband is Rwandan. I asked her if she was nervous, as a Congolese woman, to be going to Rwanda. She responds, “I love my husband, it is as simple as that.” The baby becomes restless. She begins breast feeding. Her expression never changes. She is clear, calm, and straightforward. She is beautiful. Both she and her husband are barefoot; their clothes are dusty. The baby’s name is Tomsefo. In Swahili it means “glory from God.” It’s a girl.



JOHN PRENDERGAST: If there had been no genocide in Rwanda, there would have been no subsequent war in the Congo. As the armed elements who perpetrated the genocide poured over the border into Congo in 1994, hotly pursued by the Rwandan forces that stopped the genocide, they brought their unfinished war with them. Vastly complicating efforts to feed the civilians, amidst the one million or so refugees were *genocidaires* [perpetrators of Rwandan genocide in 1994]. All international standards related to separation of civilian and military populations were broken in the effort to save the lives of refugee populations dying of malnutrition and cholera in the Congolese camps.

The Rwandan militias began to reorganize in the refugee camps, and for the next two years launched attacks into Rwanda. Rwanda warned the world that if something was not done about this, it would take matters into its own hands. When nothing in fact was done, Rwanda invaded the Congo in 1996, attacking the refugee camps and driving insurgents and civilians alike deep into the Congolese jungle. Unknown thousands of Rwandan refugees perished in the years that followed as a result of massacres, malnutrition, or disease.

Until very recently, no meaningful effort was undertaken to deal with the underlying problem of the Rwandan militias. Only beginning in 2004 did the UN finally attempt to create opportunities and programs to demobilize and repatriate Rwandan militia who are willing to go home. But the numbers are still large enough that the stability of the region remains at risk.

Militias and Armed Groups: Goma



Angelina Jolie: We pass soldiers with guns. It is complicated; they are a militia put together by the local government. They have brought some stability, but they have also been accused of harassment by local people on occasion. If their leader decided that they should use force tomorrow then they would, and they are 20,000 strong. It is a scary thought.



JOHN PRENDERGAST: The militias throughout the east provide the biggest threat to peace in the Congo. In

both Ituri and the Kivus [Provinces of North and South Kivu], internal dynamics and external support ensure that pacification of the east will not be a quick or easy task. Armed groups have terrorized eastern Congo since the mid-1990s. Some of these are the combatants in the civil war, including the government army and groups known as the RCD [Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie] and the MLC [Mouvement de Libération du Congo]. There are, however, many other armed elements principally organized in the form of militias. These militias range from armed factions in the northeast, the Ituri Province, to local defense forces

and foreign militias in the east, the Kivus. In both places, armed elements prey on civilian populations, looting assets, raping women, and undermining any authority that exists.



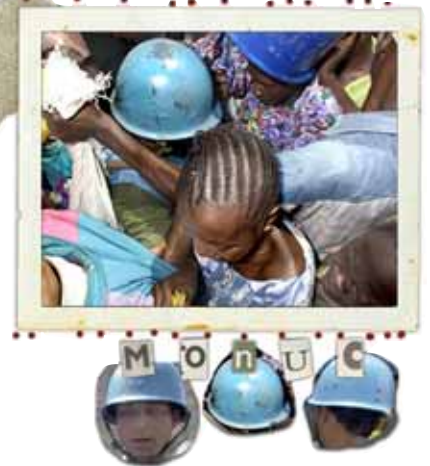
The terms of the Congolese peace agreements are clear regarding the main civil war combatants, but opaque regarding the militias. Hopes that they will melt away in the face of a new unified army and transitional government appear to be wishful thinking. If cantonment and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration are not pursued rapidly, the war will resume with greater ferocity than ever before.

Travel narration

Angelina Jolie: We board a small Air Serve plane. "Less than one hour to Bunia." The displaced camp in Bunia is right next to the airport. It is the safest place.

MONUC: Bunia

Angelina Jolie: I am introduced to a woman who is starting a committee in the camp. She is a widow with two children. She came here to be near the UN soldiers because so many people were killed in her town. She says across all communities in all of Congo, unemployment is causing most problems. "Okay," she says, "actually security first, then the jobs."





She thanks me for coming from far away to see them. In that statement, I think how much a simple gesture, just visiting, means. No one here knows what I do for a living, my name, or if I have money. They just know I came from a “more fortunate country.” I am a foreigner who cares how they are and wants to hear what they have to say.

JOHN PRENDERGAST: The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUC, originated in response to the initial peace agreement signed by the parties and the warring states in 1999. The signatories thrust upon the UN a burden that it was not ready to accept; that is, full responsibility for implementing and enforcing the agreement. The signatories wanted MONUC to monitor the disengagement of forces and disarm the Rwandan militias, forcibly if necessary. With no strategic interest and great skepticism, the UN Security Council gave MONUC a weak mandate, inadequate resources, and little diplomatic follow-up. It took three years for member states to contribute enough troops to bring MONUC up to its authorized capacity.

It was only in 2003—with the appointment of a strong UN Special Representative, former U.S. Ambassador William Swing, the active diplomatic efforts of South Africa, and the support of the European Union in a military deployment to Ituri Province—that MONUC finally became relevant to the efforts to consolidate peace in Congo.

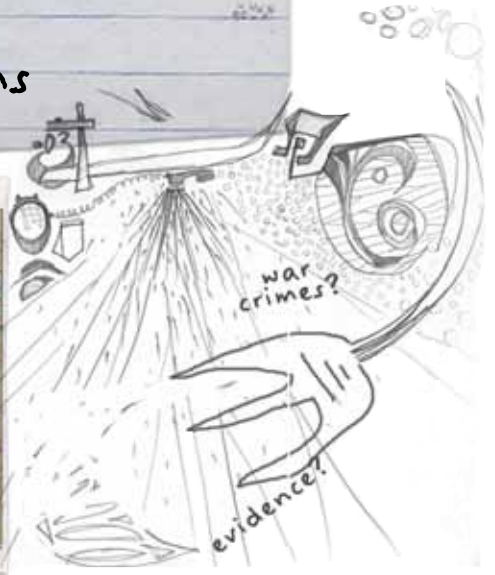
Travel narration (Bukavu)

Angelina Jolie: It's beautiful and lush, many farmers and goats. . . . Lake Kivu is on our left as we drive. Across the water, you can see Rwanda . . .

Attacks on villages, collapse of coping systems

Angelina Jolie: We meet John. He tells us of a plan to visit Bunyakiri. Just beyond where we are going is the front line of fighting.

The villagers have been looted over and over again. They rebuild again and again with less every time. On top of that, people outside the armies take advantage of the chaos and are “picking the bones.” Some villages have become organized. They cook and put packages together to appease the enemy. Others suffer far worse; they are tortured, pillaged, kidnapped, and enslaved. Interahamwe, Mayi Mayi, and the RCD [Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie] rebels are all operating in these areas. On any given day or any given week, villages could be raided by all three. That is how the violence continues to grow. When you are hungry, tortured, and your women are raped, you become desperate and violent. “You’ve been brutalized; then you start to be brutal.”



JOHN PRENDERGAST: Civilians have been preyed upon in unprecedented ways—attacks, rapes, mutilations, cannibalism, and the use of internally displaced persons and refugees as meal tickets and human shields for militias with genocidal ideologies. There are very few set battles. Rather, there is usually systematic looting, pillaging, and predation. Rape has increased. The cycles of brutality deepen.

It is not a coincidence that with no viable economic opportunities, no functional government, no accountability for war crimes, and no check on external arms supplies that armed groups continue to prey on communities, with unparalleled cruelty. Ending impunity is a critical component of ending the war in the east.

Prosecutions through the International Criminal Court [ICC] could be an effective means by which to create some measure of accountability. Because of the extraordinary level of crimes against humanity perpetrated in the Congo, the ICC initiated its first ever preliminary investigation in 2003 by collecting evidence of war crimes in Ituri Province. On June 24, 2004, ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo announced the commencement of a full criminal investigation into crimes committed throughout Congo since July 2002 when the court's jurisdiction began. Political pressure from the transitional government and the international community, who fear judicial proceedings could undercut and jeopardize the political process, slowed efforts by the ICC to build dossiers on the perpetrators and could provide further impediments to building cases. Impunity is alive and well in Congo.

Travel narration

September 11, 2003

Angelina Jolie: We are up early for a long drive. It is a gorgeous morning.

As we drive along on the side of the cliff, there are women with baskets on their heads and babies on their backs.

We arrive in Bunyakiri.



Rape / Counseling: Bunyakiri



Angelina Jolie: We enter a room of all women. It is dark inside the cement room. Many hold babies and some are breast-feeding. The majority of the women are in their early twenties. We ask them to speak freely about what they have been through during the war. No one speaks and no one moves.

We say, "You can tell us your story in general, if you wish. It does not have to be very personal."

"We are the women of Bunyakiri. We have suffered a lot. We thank you for hearing us. Our homes were looted and burned. We slept in the forest. Many women died and many were killed. It feels as if the war was against us. The rape was the most shocking. They made us cook, then stole our food and brutally raped us. We had to plant in areas where we worked hard. They would steal all our crops. If we got sick, we had no way to get to hospital. We had no funds. We are displaced. We have nothing. As a result of the violence, many of us have sexually transmitted diseases. Our families after the rape have banished us. And we cannot afford to send our children to school."

JOHN PRENDERGAST: It has become a cliché over the past half century that women bear the brunt of war. That would be an understatement in Congo. Rape has become a routine tactic of war and instrument of violence in Congo. Gross atrocities are routinely committed in the context of mass rape. Lately, there are reports of atrocities and deliberate acts of mutilation committed in the context of mass rape. Brutal rape,

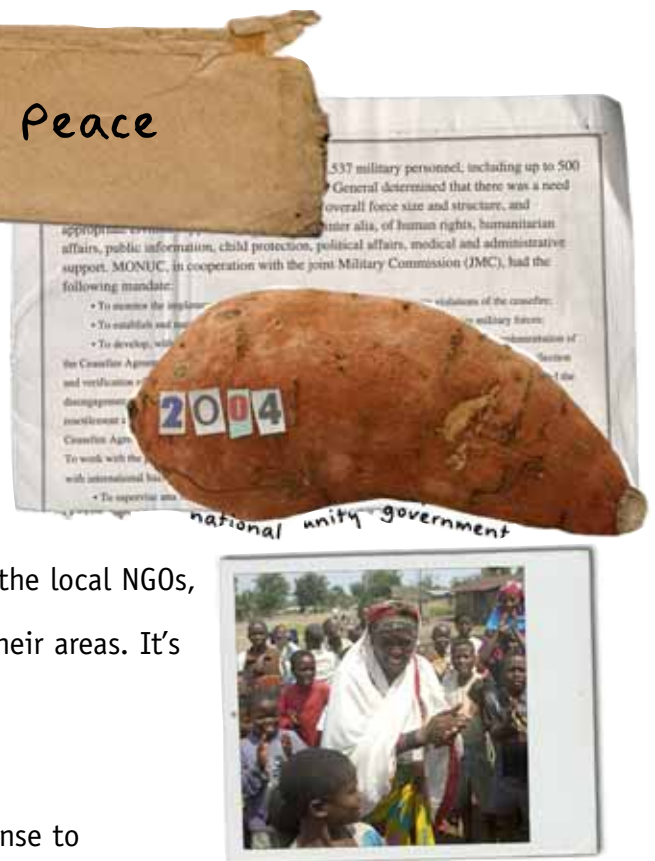
kidnapping of women, and forced concubinage have become war behaviors. The brutality of rape appears to be unprecedented globally, and certainly without historical precedent in Congo.

The ages of rape victims range from 4 to 80. Rape victims are disowned by their families, and there are terrible psychological effects from these attacks. Despite the end of the war, rape is still widely practiced, as there remains total impunity for these crimes. Some efforts have been made to provide trauma counseling, but so far it is a drop in the bucket relative to need.

Hope and Challenges for Peace

Angelina Jolie: Yesterday was the first meeting to unify the RCD rebels and the Mayi Mayi. The transitional process is fragile. But what is interesting here is that the Congolese people on the ground are working towards peace themselves, militias and all ethnic groups, everyone. The local people and the local NGOs, with no outside help, are brokering their own peace deals in their areas. It's amazing. They deserve support.

JOHN PRENDERGAST: By the beginning of 2004 and in response to concerted international diplomacy and pressure, a peace agreement between Congolese and regional belligerents was finally being implemented, albeit slowly. A national unity government had been formed, and it was attempting to extend its administration into the previously ungoverned and war-ravaged east. In many places, local deals were being forged, and local communities were taking the lead in recon-



struction and reconciliation efforts. The UN Security Council had finally provided for a more robust mandate for what was previously an ineffectual observer mission, even though—for a country as big as continental Europe—there is still only one-quarter the number of peacekeepers that tiny Kosovo has. The neighbors were put on notice that further intrusive meddling would have political and economic costs. While serious implementation challenges remained, a major corner appeared to have been turned, barely.

Conclusion

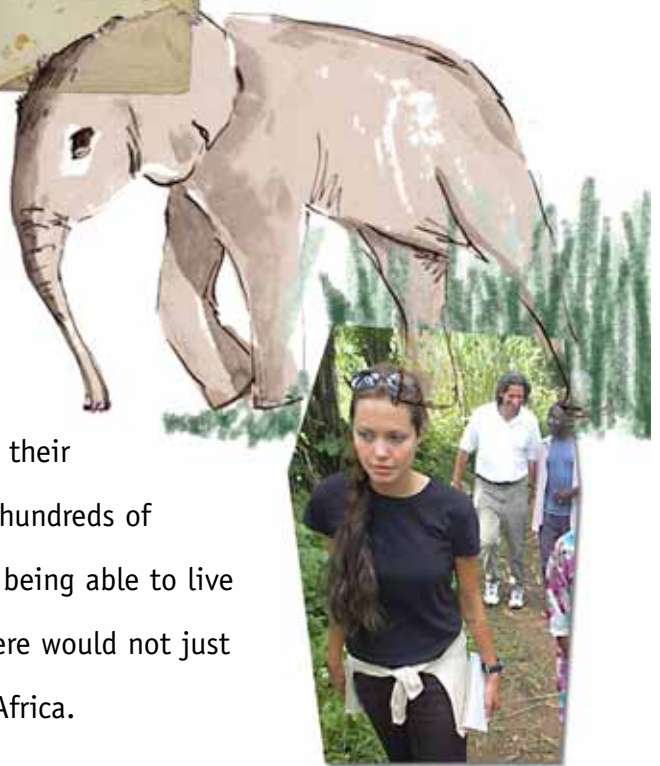
Angelina Jolie:

As we fly out of Congo,
I think of the young
Congoese boys I met in
Tanzania last year who fled their

country after becoming orphaned from the war. I think of the hundreds of thousands living in camps on the border, dreaming of one day being able to live at home in Congo. I believe I am right in saying that peace here would not just stop the killing but begin to give hope and stability to all of Africa.

JOHN PRENDERGAST: But by mid-2004, the complexities of the Congo and the costs of international inattention reared their heads again. Fresh fighting broke out in the eastern Congolese town of Bukavu. And UN investigators concluded that Rwanda was behind the insurrection.

There is an old African proverb, well-known around the world that says, “When the elephants fight it is the grass that suffers.” In Congo, the grass is suffering more than anywhere else in the world. The answer to this



lies in the international community's responsibility to protect those that are being adversely affected. That responsibility to protect means a number of things. It means providing much more humanitarian aid. It

means giving much more support for UN troops to protect civilians. It means

becoming much more serious about disarming the predatory militias. It

means engaging in much more diplomacy aimed at healing

regional and internal rifts. And it means providing much

more support to the new Congolese government. As Elie

Wiesel has said, "we cannot stand idly by." Millions of lives

are at stake in Congo. We simply must act.



"...The answer to this lies in the international community's responsibility to protect..."
- John

