

Forum of Congolese Organisations in South Africa (FOCAS)

Open opinion on The CongoCaust.

Johannesburg, 27 January 2010

The CongoCaust or the cost of human lives in the DRC war. “*While academics spend time and money to discuss figures and derive the causes, the people continue to pay the cost with their lives*”, said **Golden Misabiko**, a Congolese Human Rights advocate and member of ASADHO.

Thursday 20th January 2010, BBC News posted on its website an article entitled: “**DR Congo war deaths 'exaggerated'**” referring to a report from a Canada-based Human Security Report Project. According to this article “*The number of people killed in a decade of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo may be half of the accepted toll of 5.4 million*”. The Project says “*many of the deaths between 1998 and 2008 would have occurred without conflict. The figure was used to justify ramping up the UN presence in the country*”. So what justifies the reduction of figures from Canadian research project? Asked DRC community members meeting in Johannesburg to discuss the CongoCaust. No response for the moment, but the high number of mining companies funding researches projects in Canada and elsewhere in western Universities can be one of the paths to follow.

Congoleseⁱ from the DRC based in South Africa uses **Congocaust** to refer to huge loss of lives in their home country. “*Unlike other holocausts, the Congocaust is driven by the gluttonous need from commercial firms to acquire raw material at below market price over a prolonged period of time*”, said **Ountsche Ilondo**, the students’ leader and chair person of the non profit organisation “Umbrella. The DRC Communityⁱⁱ has been discussing on the cost paid so far and the role of the international community in their country. Students’ organizationsⁱⁱⁱ had convened meetings to find the better qualification of the ongoing catastrophe since the slavery era. “Umbrella, Retour au Congo, Bonne Gouvernance and Mahala News with the support of FOCAS succeeded to convene a public meeting on the 4th January 2010 in Tswane (Pretoria, South Africa), around the concept of **Congocaust**. On 16th January, hundreds of leaflets were distributed by FOCAS in Johannesburg at the public cultural event organised by the Kasai Community in South Africa (Cokas)^{iv}. Since then the Congocaust is attracting intellectual debate.

The report from the Canadian Human Security Project is the kind of negationism or revitionism of the Congocaust. An extract of this report on BBC website states: “*A formal peace accord ended a war in December 2002, but unrest has continued in the volatile east of the country. [...] Large numbers of people would have died without the conflict - simply because basic living conditions in DR Congo were so tough*”. The article concludes “*then the researchers used their higher mortality rate to recalculate the figures, they found the number dropped below 3 million*”. Is this an attempt to re-examine existing knowledge about historical events occurred in DRC, or an intention to distort historical record such that Congocaust appears in a more favorable light? Is this a strategy to reroute advocacy campaigning to end the Congocaust? Responses from the Canadian Human Security Project will appease the DRC community.

On 23 January, Representatives of Civil Society in Kinshasa published a press release stating their indignation about “*a certain Canadian university revising statistics of Congolese dead during the war imposed from outside*” (La population congolaise a suivi avec indignation une certaine démonstration scientifique d’une université canadienne relayée par des radios

périphériques sur le dénombrement des morts congolais, victimes des multiples guerres qui lui sont imposées de l'extérieur). The press release conclude : « *the Congolese civil society is deeply concerned that all this macabre calculation made by the academics are done on parents, brothers and sisters of congolese who still bearing their funerals of their very closed relatives. You can't make fun of an entire nation* » (La société civile congolaise se sent d'autant plus indignée que ces calculs macabres auxquels se sont adonnés ces « scientifiques » d'autres lieux portent sur des parents et des frères et sœurs des congolais qui continuent encore à porter le deuil de leurs proches. On ne se moque pas ainsi de tout peuple).

According to Umbrella and other Focas members, “*the word Congocaust is made up of Congo: referring to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where committed **atrocious acts have the highest rate in the world** and Caust, from Holocaust which is a Greek word that can be translated as “burning of a whole” or “engulfed in fire”*”. Umbrella takes two examples to explain the concept. From the late 1990's, “*the need to acquire cheap raw minerals exposed DRC which is sitting with 80% of the world's known Colombo Tantalum reserves. Just like the King Leopold II used mercenaries from as far as Dahomey while occupying Congo, many multinationals have enrolled the services of Rwanda and Uganda's regular armies to occupy DRC with the help of local small scale companies in order to ensure costless minerals supply. The current and ongoing tragedy has already claimed over 6.4 millions from direct and related conflict causes*”.

Referring to King Leopold II the group states that “*in the 1890's, when a great need for rubber from car industries broke out, King Leopold II of Belgium set up a silent but large scale horrible exploitation of Congolese, mostly by limb chopping and village burning in a bid to terrorise them and increase rubber production. This barbaric strategy cost up to 10 millions lives over 23 years*”.

Such mass killings are easily perpetrated through militarization of civilians and peaceful villages to create militias and all kind of armed groups that force civilians to work as forced labours. “*Militarization guarantees control of forced labourers, and prevent any civil rights protest*”, **said Francois Butedi, Executive Director of Focas**. The raw material searches through conflict have tended, in the DRC post colonial, to exploit existing cracks in communities and turn them into armed conflicts. This approach has lead to mass killings and ethnic cleansing of groups sitting on the richest soil. This phenomenon was fairly recorded with Rwanda manipulating Congolese tribes, especially the Tutsi, and Leopold II who raised an army of orphans to quell away any attempt of revolts in the Congo.

Congolese community in South Africa is very grateful vis-a-vis international organizations, especially to the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, and individuals who never spare time to speak out against the Congocaust phenomenon. To stop the Belgian King killings, journalists and human rights activists had denounced the facts and the so called “Belgian civilisation mission to improve blacks' standard of life” that led to massive killing. Today, various NGOs keep denouncing some western and African countries and corporate direct involvement in the Congocaust, as well as the UN militarism strategies against Rwandan rebels in eastern DRC.

One can accept that historians discuss figures like Roger Casement who advanced in 1904 that only 3 millions of Congolese were killed since 1885, Forbath estimated the figure up to 5 millions, Adam Hochschild talked about 10 millions, and the *Encyclopædia Britannica* states 8 to 30 millions deaths from 1885 to 1960. But reports such the one from Canadian Human Security Project are worrisome. They tend to deny facts or review statistics. The international community is present in the DRC since 1999 through the UN mission and specialised research centres. Its 20,000 troops are deployed across the country, conducting military operations against foreign rebels' groups, contributing to increase the number of

deaths. It is unacceptable that the Congo cost in human life due to international failure and corporate involvement be denied today through research centres; worse by Canadian universities.

The message from Congolese community in South Africa and the Civil Society in Kinshasa, under the initiative of FOCAS and its organizations' members, reflects the general view of Congolese across the globe. It calls Canada to refute this report and other researchers to disapprove the Canadian Human Security Project. On the other side it calls their second nation of residence (South Africa) and all other nations and international institutions to strongly oppose the militarism of UN developed so far in DRC and to privilege political solutions to the crisis in the DRC and neighbouring countries to stop the Congocaust. DRC Community in SA believes that South Africa, after investing a huge amount of money and diplomatic efforts to solve the situation in DRC and Burundi has a unique position, in the sub-region, to influence political solution in the great lake region, especially in Rwanda. Stop CongoCaust. Stop MONUC militarism solution which is costing on daily basis human lives. Stop negationism of the Congocaust.

FOCAS (url: www.focascongo.org)

ⁱ There are two Congo separated by the Congo river: Congo-Brazzaville and Congo-Kinshasa or Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

ⁱⁱ with a disputable estimated number of 800,000 people, the DRC community in South Africa is among big foreign communities. Most of its members are concentrated in Johannesburg, Tswane (Pretoria), Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg and Durban. Small groups are disseminated in towns such East London, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth. Community members have seven mutual aid groups: Kasai Community in South Africa (Cokas), Nsalasani for the Bas-Congo province, Bandundu Mutual aid in South Africa (Murbas), Okapi for Oriental province, Mabenga for Equateur province, Katanga-Ka-Mikuba, and Umoja Wa Kivu for Maniema South and North Kivu. Congolese have more than 40 confessional groups (Churches, Catholic Francophone Parishes, and sects); NGO's and Youth groups, as well as political parties.

ⁱⁱⁱ DRC students have organisations at Wits University, University of Johannesburg, Tswane University of Technology, and University of Pretoria.

^{iv} The Congolese community in South Africa is encompassed is estimated by