



10 April 2014 – Identifying a fighter with neither uniform nor insignia is difficult, to say the least.

Not so long ago, the world received much welcomed news as the M23 rebels agreed to disarm. But today the fighters of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) continue to spread fear in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) - wearing no uniform.

Amongst their leadership are people who played a central role in the Rwandan genocide 20 years ago, and who the international community would seek to bring to justice.

The FDLR was formed by the remnants of the Rwandan armed forces (FAR), the national army of Rwanda, and the Interahamwe, the Hutu militia that led the 1994 genocide. After 20 years in neighbouring DRC, the armed group has survived by recruiting fighters from the local population. The FDLR claim to wear no uniform or insignia because they have no support from a foreign country, much like the M23 fighters.

Because the FDLR is entrenched in local communities mixing with civilians, and its members do not wear uniforms, identifying them in a large military action will be a difficult task. The key to identifying them, according to a civil society activist based in Togo, is to look at the footwear. “The ones wearing the gumboots - they are FDLR”, Patrice Munga* told [IRIN News Service](#) .

The Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), part of the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC called [MONUSCO](#), is a heavily armed military unit, which has begun preparations to launch an offensive against armed insurgent groups in the DRC. Yet, the robust military mandate from the Security Council carries with it, “high risks for the civilian population of DRC”. The FIB is acting in cooperation with the national army of the DRC, the main goal of the operation being FDLR surrendering with their weapons and having them return to Rwanda.

Views in the national army forces on the FDLR however have differed in the past. Some maintain cordial relations with FDLR figures as they have focused on the eradication of other armed groups, functioning on the principle of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

Others in the national army, however, maintain a hardline view against the FDLR and any association with them. A third point of view also exists, namely those who believe that instead of maintaining the conflict, the Rwandan government should negotiate with the FDLR. The third option does remain out of the question as FDLR members maintain Hutu superiority views, which led to the Rwandan genocide in the first place.

MONUSCO has been on the ground in DRC since 2010 and included a military aspect to the previously solely humanitarian mandate. In 2013, in the face of escalating attacks and recurring conflict, the Security Council created a special military division. However, the upcoming conflicts will prove difficult, as the FDLR is not a clearly demarcated enemy and its soldiers hide inside civilian populations.

Beyond the military dimension, MONUSCO’s aim is also to prosecute and pursue perpetrators of rape and sexual violence. “Despite an increase in the number of prosecutions of state agents for sexual violence in recent years, there is still a long way to go in the fight against impunity for sexual violence in the DRC,” [said](#) the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is slowly recovering from the conflict that took place between 1994 and 2003, which led to the loss of some five million lives. But many eastern areas of the DRC are still plagued by violence as various insurgent groups continue to operate there.

*Name has been changed for safety reasons

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