

# Displacement and difference in Lubumbashi

by Aurelia Wa Kabwe-Segatti and Loren B Landau

**Signs on the outskirts of the second largest city in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) welcome visitors to 'the city of peace'. Lubumbashi has a reputation as a haven of tolerance in a violent nation but how are displaced people treated?**

For people from eastern Congo who have lived through more than a decade of violence, the city – located in the vast country's far southwestern corner – offers an undeniable allure. The copper-mining city serves as the capital of the relatively prosperous Katanga province and has escaped the direct effects of the country's civil wars. Laurent Kabila, the assassinated former president whose son won DRC's first-ever democratic election in November 2006, invited war-affected people to find protection

in a city that he conquered early in his successful campaign to oust Mobutu Sese-Seko, the despot who ruled DRC for over three decades.

Kabila's movement, the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo (AFDL), began its rebellion in 1996 by dismantling Rwandan refugee camps on the eastern border. Kabila later established the Commissariat à la Réintégration to assist both soldiers and displaced persons. While soldiers

who deserted Mobutu's army in the mid-1990s were assisted in Camp Uilo in Kolwezi, approximately 300 km away from Lubumbashi, tens of thousands of IDPs from across the country's war-torn east sought protection and aid in the city itself. The first IDPs to arrive came from Kalemie, a city near Lake Tanganyika that experienced at first hand the brutality of the militias who have killed and displaced millions of Congolese. Those from Kalemie were soon followed by people from the country's more northern provinces: Equateur, Province Orientale, Ituri, the Kivus and Maniema.

In a migrant labour system inspired by the South Africa model, mineworkers have long been drawn from across Congo

(especially Maniema and Kasai Provinces), and what is now Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique and Angola.<sup>1</sup> Compromised by this diversity, the city has developed a rhetoric of tolerance and inclusion that is a proud part of its 'Lushois' identity. In line with these principles, urban sites designated for IDPs' settlement and assistance were located in the heart of the city's residential areas. The majority of the city's IDPs soon found shelter with members of their immediate or extended families that had already settled in the city. IDPs were encouraged to organise politically in order to articulate their interests with the local and national governments and in 1998 formed the Comité Provincial des Personnes Déplacées de Guerre.

Rhetoric and formal policy suggest a progressive and inclusive city, yet Lubumbashi has a repeated history

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of sometimes violent xenophobia against both IDPs and long-term residents with origins elsewhere in Congo – particularly those from the country's Kasai Province. Zambians have lived in the Congo for generations but few have become Congolese citizens or learned to speak French, instead using Bemba, a language spoken on both sides of the border. Moreover, almost none of the Zambians have Congolese citizenship.

### Discrimination against IDPs

In discussion with IDPs in Lubumbashi, we heard that when the first trains carrying displaced people organised by the government arrived from Kalemie, the city's mayor not only immediately relocated them to Kamalongo but prevented IDPs from getting the food aid to which they were entitled. Although the IDPs were later resettled in the city, there have been repeated cases where local elites have attempted

to block assistance – at times using subterfuge by registering relatives as IDPs in order to collect food rations. The mayor remains hostile, regularly using pejorative terms like *uchafu* (dirty) or *mbalimbalikuja* (those who have come from far away) to describe and dissociate IDPs. A local politician is reported to have banned locals from marrying displaced women, alleging they are responsible for bringing HIV/AIDs into the city as a result of having been raped by Rwandan soldiers, government troops or *mayi-mayi* militias in the north.<sup>2</sup> The governor of Katanga has also accused IDPs of disturbing the province, an unfair charge from a man widely held to have close relations with the *mayi-mayi* militias originally responsible for the persecution and displacement of many of those who have sought refuge in Lubumbashi.

IDPs report daily discrimination, chastised for speaking grammatically proper Swahili instead of Lubumbashi's distinctive Swahili dialect and abused by local Lushois who are not themselves eligible for aid distributed by the World Food Programme or other relief organisations. There is also tension between groups of IDPs. Jacques Kabulo, formerly the provincial secretary of the IDP committee, reports that the IDPs who first arrived in Lubumbashi from Kalemie tried to exclude other IDPs from services and land.

Former hosts who have been negatively affected by the city's economic crisis have also tired of hosting IDPs. In some instances, they have asked IDPs to leave their homes, violating traditional norms of hospitality and generating ruptures within extended families. Many IDPs report trouble accessing health and education services. UNICEF provided textbooks for a new school for IDP children but the government failed to pay the teachers. Since many IDPs cannot afford school fees their children remain out of the classroom.

Formal IDP settlements were closed in 2001, obliging most IDPs to survive as best they can in the informal economy. Small numbers have returned home, receiving only token support from the government and Jesuit Refugee Services – a \$50 grant and a departure kit of cooking pans, blankets and

machetes – but most have accepted the kit and then remained in Lubumbashi.<sup>3</sup> Many of those we spoke to indicated they are likely to stay in Lubumbashi for the long term although some plan on returning home if conditions improve, while others dream of resettling to Zambia, South Africa or even outside Africa.

The central government in Kinshasa has created a specialised agency to assist people displaced by the war but local politicians have not supported the initiative. Many urban IDPs and refugees live without direct humanitarian assistance.

The profile of IDPs rose in 2006 as ambitious politicians became keen to secure their votes; one candidate even undertook his own IDP census in order to boost his electoral chances. IDPs have still not found a true champion, however, and now the election is over they continue to face ongoing discrimination and political scapegoating.

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*A fuller version of this article is online at: [www.fmreview.org/pdf/kabwe-segatti&landau.pdf](http://www.fmreview.org/pdf/kabwe-segatti&landau.pdf)*

1. For more details, see D Dibwe dia Mwembu, *Histoire des Conditions De Vie Des Travailleurs de L'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga/Gécamines (1910-1999)*, Presse Universitaire de Lubumbashi, 2001.

2. For an account of the current situation of HIV-infected IDPs in Lubumbashi, see 'RDC Survivre au viol et au déracinement', [www.irinnews.org/FrenchReport.asp?ReportID=7067&SelectRegion=Grands\\_lacs&SelectCountry=RDC](http://www.irinnews.org/FrenchReport.asp?ReportID=7067&SelectRegion=Grands_lacs&SelectCountry=RDC)

3. According to Faustin Kitenge Katoto in July 2006 there were 26,000 IDPs in Lubumbashi. Information sent by email 21.08.2006.