

WAM in peacekeeping operations: URUBAT's DRRR experience in the DRC, 2014–15

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Introduction

Upon arrival in the DRC, members of the MONUSCO DRRR section are deployed almost immediately. To carry out their work efficiently it is important for members of the section to understand the *context* in which they are working, including:

- the challenges faced by and concerns of the various armed groups;
- persons of consequence in the communities in which the section is working (such as religious leaders, tribal leaders, etc.);
- the local authorities (who can help to sensitize community members about disarmament);
- appropriate messages to use to convince combatants and their families to participate in a DRRR programme; and
- the most appropriate means of communication to transmit relevant messages.

Proficiency in the above areas is achieved through experience.

Once disarmament has been completed, the arms and ammunition are delivered directly to the DRRR section or to another armed contingent,¹ which then forwards them to the section or some other final destination. This paper discusses the procedures for handling the weapons and ammunition received as part of DRRR programmes in the DRC, and takes a detailed look at URUBAT's involvement and its WAM procedures.

URUBAT's mandate

URUBAT's main tasks were laid down in the mission's mandate. These were:

- to protect civilians;
- to neutralize armed groups present in its area of operations;
- to monitor the application of the arms embargo;
- to provide support to national and international judicial processes (UNSC, 2014, para. 4); and
- to support DRRR/DDR programmes (UNSC, 2014, para. 5(g)).

As a reserve force battalion, URUBAT had to be able to operate day and night and deploy within a short time frame from its base in Goma, North Kivu province. It was also deployed in two contingency operating bases in Pinga and Kitchanga villages in North Kivu.

For the fulfilment of its mission and assigned tasks, URUBAT was made up of a battalion, four mobile infantry companies, and a support company of 750 troops (approximately 44 women and 706 men).² The overall numbers remain the same today, but the ratio of men and women changes with every contingent deployed.

Handling of weapons and ammunition during the disarmament process

Peace support actors involved in DDRRR programmes for the voluntary disarmament and repatriation of foreign armed groups in the DRC focused on the disarmament part of the programme.³ Once the weapons and ammunition were collected, it became MONUSCO's responsibility to store them until UNMAS destroyed them.

Once a weapon was received, the marking(s), model, calibre, serial number, armed group of origin (if it was possible to identify this), name or registration number of the combatant, and the location where it was received were registered. After the weapon arrived at the final DDRRR deposit area, if possible the procedure was to register:

- the country of manufacture (or most recent importing country if the weapon carried a relevant marking);
- year of manufacture;
- other markings (including their location on the weapon);
- its storage code (or location);
- its DDRRR label number;
- previous transfers (including dates and responsibility for custody); and
- its destruction details (the date, location, method, entity that performed the destruction, and the entity that verified the destruction) or its delivery to national security forces.

Similar procedures were followed for ammunition and explosive materials. The category (whether ammunition or an explosive), type, quantity, calibre, name or registration number of the combatant from which it was obtained, armed group of origin (if known), and the location where it was received were all recorded. In the DDRRR deposit area other details were also recorded, such as the markings of small arms and machine guns, the lot number, the manufacturer, country of origin, its condition (whether in a good or bad state), storage code (or location), previous transfers (dates

and custody), and destruction details (the date, location, method used, and the entities that performed and verified the destruction).

Weapons and ammunition were stored separately and organized for transport in accordance with instructions and guidance from a WAM expert. In practice, in the DRC the weapons that were received were destroyed when they were not in good condition. In certain periods those found to be in acceptable condition were handed over to the new Congolese army.

Ammunition that presented an immediate risk or was considered to be unfit to be transported was destroyed on site by qualified specialists. Simultaneously, the DDRRR weapons registration database was updated.

Tracing of weapons and ammunition

While disarming ex-combatants and conducting and verifying arms and ammunition procedures are essential, stopping the flow of arms and ammunition to a conflict zone is an equally important task. DDRRR officers collaborated in this process by documenting information about the factories that produced the weapons and ammunition that were collected, thereby helping to identify their origin as quickly as possible. For this task they needed relevant instructions and a guide to factory and associated marks. In addition to producing practical results, this type of monitoring from the first step of disarmament helped to put psychological pressure on individuals linked to the trafficking and use of illicit weapons, ammunition, and explosives.

Contributing to the detection of small arms and light weapons that were illicitly manufactured or trafficked, the DDRRR section found that some weapons recovered as part of DDRRR programmes were from different factories and had the same identification numbers, while others that had matching numbers were from the same factory.⁴

Procedures for the reception and disposal of weapons recovered from illegal armed groups

For the purposes of DDRRR, a member of an armed group was defined as follows:

It is not only a person carrying weapons, but also defined as: a person who is part of an armed group with support capacity and who acts as a messenger, servant, spy, bodyguard, or sexual slave, etc (MONUSCO, 2012).

This determined that not all those who were part of DDR processes delivered weapons and ammunition.

The armed groups present in the area of operations in North Kivu province were both foreigners (Rwandans and Ugandans) and people of different local ethnicities (Nyangas,

Hundes, and Hutus). Normal disarmament procedures materialized as a result of small groups volunteering to participate, or as part of a negotiation process on disarmament, as was the case with the FDLR.

URUBAT worked on disarmament both independently of and together with the MONUSCO DDR section. Working independently⁵ and despite a host of challenges (see Box 1), it carried out the following tasks in its contingency operating bases:

- disarming and storing weapons of former fighters;
- temporarily disabling and registering weapons and ammunition in accordance with SOPs;
- detailed reporting to the MONUSCO DDRRR section;
- transporting and escorting personnel, weapons, and ammunition to the MONUSCO DDRRR section; and
- formally delivering weapons.

Using these procedures, in the period June 2014–April 2015, 62 members of armed groups were demobilized and 13 weapons (AK-47s) were recovered.

Working in support of the DDRRR section, URUBAT also provided transport and escorts for ex-combatants and their relatives, weapons, and ammunition; supported the extraction and transfer of combatants; and provided technical and logistical support to DDRRR field teams. In November 2014 in Villa Bulyausa, a sub-province of North Kivu, 87 FDLR members and 67 of their relatives were demobilized, resulting in 40 rifles, two machine guns, one mortar, and one RPG-7 being recovered. All of the weapons and ammunition were delivered to the MONUSCO DDRRR section based

Box 1 Unpredictable challenges: weather and terrain

The terrain in North Kivu province, where URUBAT carried out operations, is unfavourable and very restrictive for the deployment of troops, due to the combination of mountains, jungle, and roads in very poor condition. In urban areas there are also restrictions on movement, the use of force, and surveillance due to high population density and narrow streets, which are generally also in poor condition. Weather conditions (temperature, humidity, and rainfall) hindered the performance of MONUSCO troops and their mobility, thereby affecting military operations. The rapidly changing nature of the weather led to the cancellation of air operations with little notice, for example. Such operations can be decisive in terms of providing support or reinforcing troops in the field. In general, however, during the rainy season armed groups reduced the number and intensity of their operations (although their military capacity was not reduced).

in Goma city, which destroyed them in a series of ceremonies in coordination with UNMAS.

URUBAT's weapons and ammunition controls and procedures

The Uruguayan army (and URUBAT) keeps a detailed inventory of all of its weapons and ammunition, including the batch identification and expiry dates. During annual rotations weapons and ammunition remain in the mission area.

In addition to periodic inspections of COE by the inventory control teams and the operational readiness inspection, in accordance with Uruguayan army regulations, weekly inspections of a unit's armament and ammunition are also carried out. These inspections document when and by whom inspections are performed, which weapons were not inspected, and any related causes. A report on the status of the arms and ammunition is sent to Uruguay on a monthly basis, including data on updating relevant stocks and replenishment forecasts, in accordance with availability and future operational needs.

All weapons and ammunition that are not being used in operations are stored in containers that are subject to security measures specifically designed for this purpose. Surprise inspections of accommodation and facilities are also carried out to check for the presence of alcohol, drugs, and other prohibited substances, as part of which any violations of directives on the proper management of armaments and ammunition are addressed, and sanctions imposed if necessary. Sensitization on the sanctions imposed on those who fail to comply with relevant orders is also conducted regularly.

URUBAT's national procedures before departure, in addition to the UN's military police, combined with Uruguayan customs controls, ensure that any possibility of arms trafficking from the mission area to Uruguay is severely restricted or eliminated.

From an operational point of view, an ongoing evaluation of risks and threats to determine the type of operations and the level of force to be employed, as well as the capacity for immediate reinforcement or extraction, is essential to avoid situations where troops find themselves at a disadvantage, which could lead to the loss of weapons.

A final aspect to highlight is the complexity of replenishing ammunition in a mission area, particularly for armed forces who must acquire it on the international market, which necessitates negotiation, appropriate timing, and—above all—coordination.

During the period under discussion (2014–15), URUBAT reported no losses of weapons or ammunition.

Endnotes

- 1 In addition to their own functions, other armed contingents often temporarily assume the tasks of the DDRRR section by guarding weapons, ammunition, and explosives, and assisting in their destruction.
- 2 URUBAT is part of the Uruguayan contribution to MONUSCO. The total number of Uruguayans taking part in MONUSCO is currently 937 (UN, n.d.).
- 3 Whereas MONUSCO was tasked with supporting DDRRR for foreign armed groups, it was not *directly* involved with DDR programmes, which focused on national armed groups.
- 4 These irregularities fall under Article 7 of the Nairobi Protocol (2004), under which the DRC committed to placing a unique marking on each weapon at the time of manufacture or import.
- 5 When URUBAT worked independently of the DDRRR section, all technical DDRRR duties (such as keeping a disarmament registry and temporarily storing recovered weapons and ammunition) were its responsibility, in addition to providing transport and escorts. When it provided support to the MONUSCO DDRRR section, URUBAT provided technical and logistical support in the deactivation of specialized weaponry or ammunition, but the DDRRR section was responsible for technical duties.

References

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