

International Rescue Committee

**Mortality in the
Democratic Republic of Congo:
Results from a Nationwide Survey**

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Executive Summary

A complex and violent conflict has raged across much of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since August of 1998. In 2000 and 2001, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) surveyed areas in the five eastern provinces of the country to document the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis. With improved access and security during 2002, the IRC was able to measure the mortality rate among 9.3 million people accessible in the east, and among 31.2 million people in the west, by conducting a statistical sample survey. In both the east and the west, 10 health zones were selected systematically, proportional to population, and 225 households were interviewed in each health zone. The findings indicate that:

- **The mortality rate in the DRC is higher than the United Nations reports for any country in the world.** The crude mortality rate (CMR) among the people surveyed in the east was 3.5/1000/mo. (95% CI = 2.2 - 4.9); the figure was 2.0/1000/mo. (95% CI = 1.5 - 2.6) among those surveyed in the west. This indicates a national mortality rate of 2.2/1000/mo. if the 5 million inaccessible easterners are ignored, or 2.4/1000/mo. if the inaccessible are assumed to have the same mortality as the surveyed eastern population. This rate is twice the African average and almost twice the 1.3/1000/mo. reported by UNICEF for the DRC in 1997, the year before the war began.
- **Health conditions in the east are far worse than in the west.** Aside from having a higher crude mortality, the under-five-year-olds in the east die at twice the rate of those in the west: 9.0/1000/mo. [95% CI = 4.0 - 14.0] vs. 4.4/1000/mo. [95% CI = 3.2 - 5.7]. Likewise, population growth is non-existent in the east and is 1.6% per year in the west. People in the west have a higher birth rate, one-third the rate of lost pregnancies, and lower rates of death from disease. In three of the ten health zones visited in the east, more than half the children die before the age of two years.
- **The rate of death from violence in the east has decreased dramatically.** Compared to previous IRC surveys, in 2002 people in the east reported less than one-tenth the previous reported rate of death from violence. Both in places surveyed in the past and again in 2002, and as an overall average, the rate of violent death decreased dramatically in 2002 compared to the previous three years. In past surveys, violent death rates have consistently been correlated with the overall crude mortality. Probably not by chance, the only surveyed health zone with a large recorded outbreak of violence, Kisangani Ville, was the one place where the CMR increased from previous mortality surveys.
- **Mortality in the eastern DRC decreased in 2002 compared to past years.** The CMR of 3.5/1000/mo. recorded during the 2002 surveys contrasts with the IRC's previous CMR estimate of 5.4/1000/mo. for the period August 1998 to April 2001. In four out of five locations previously surveyed during this war and revisited as part of this survey, the CMR dramatically decreased. The lower rates of death and violent death, and an increase in the areas accessible to survey teams, all indicate an overall improvement of conditions in the eastern provinces.

Based on past and current IRC data,³ it is estimated that **3.3 million people have died as a result of this war.** While this estimate could vary from 3.0 to 4.7 million depending on assumptions about the populations excluded from the survey, the conclusion remains the same: this is the most deadly war ever documented in Africa, indeed the highest war death toll documented anywhere in the world during the past half-century.

Many factors may have contributed to the improved health conditions in eastern DRC in 2002. While historians, public health workers and politicians would benefit from studying the causes of this exceptionally deadly conflict, they may profit still more by determining what caused the favorable turn of events during the fourth year of the war.

Nevertheless, the present CMR of at least 3.5/1000/mo. among 9 to 14 million people in eastern DRC is a crisis of extraordinary proportions, and the adverse consequences of this war continue. If the world's peacemakers and the international community fail to give due attention to this crisis at this crucial time, all of the gains made to date could easily be lost. It is hoped that the positive trends in mortality rates documented in this report will encourage diplomatic and humanitarian efforts and inspire the international community to stay the course toward peace.