

# Vigil InSight Incident Analysis

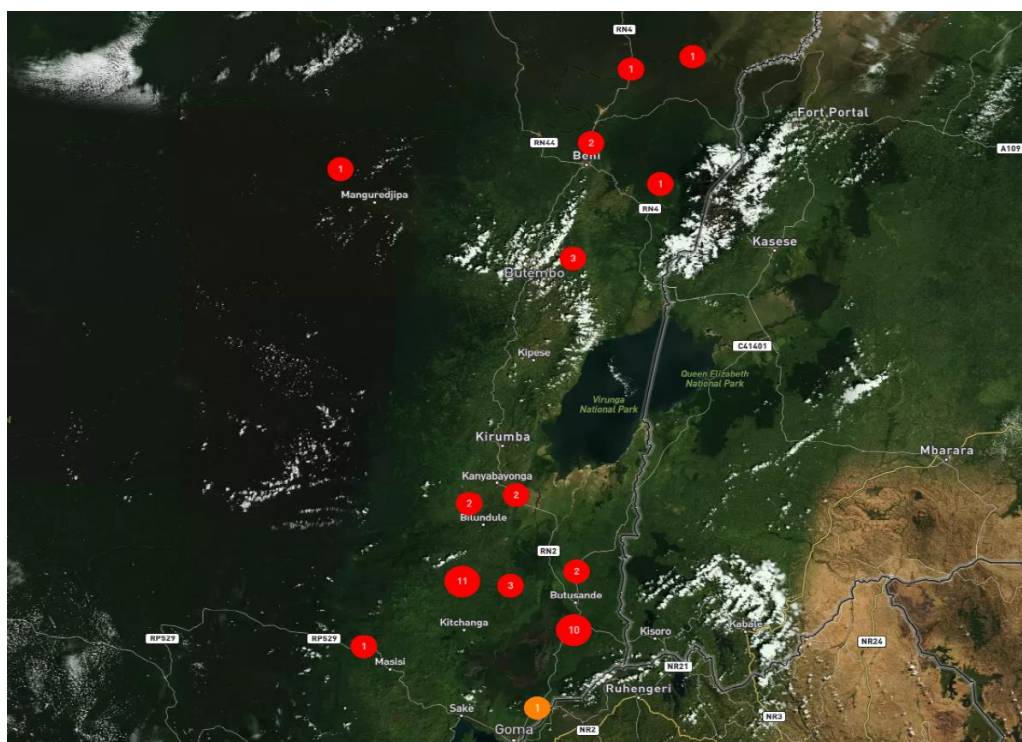
01 March 2021

## Attack on WFP convoy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

### INCIDENT

Luca Attanasio, the Italian Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a male Italian military police officer and a local World Food Program (WFP) driver were killed and a UN agency country director was critically injured during an attempted kidnapping near the regional capital Goma on 22 February. The attack occurred about 10 miles north of Goma, near Kanyamahoro town. The convoy, which included two clearly marked WFP cars, was travelling on the RN2 route.

Locations where Congolese civilians were kidnapped in the Goma / North Kivu area between 22 November 2020 and 22 February 2021 and the location where the WFP convoy was attacked on 22 February 2021



#### LEGEND

● Number of incidents in which Congolese civilians were kidnapped (not the number of people kidnapped).

● The attack on the WFP convoy on February 22nd, 2021. Please note that the location for the attack is an approximate location estimate based on available information.

Vigil InSight: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) dataset<sup>1</sup> showing the number of Congolese civilians kidnapped (not killed) in the Goma / North Kivu area between 22 November 2020 and 22 February 2021.

### SUMMARY

- This is likely to have been a kidnapping gone wrong.
- This is unlikely to have been a premeditated attack on an individual but rather an opportunistic attack in a complex environment.
- There is a long-standing history of abduction in the area.
- This incident's international resonance will change the security climate in the Kivus for the immediate future.
- Historical data suggest that it will be wise to maintain protocols at a higher level even if local practice relaxes over the coming months.

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## ANALYSIS

### Perpetrators and Purpose

It is still not clear who carried out the attack. Local authorities have presented no evidence to corroborate their claims that it was the work of the FDLR.<sup>2</sup> According to witnesses, the perpetrators spoke Kinyarwanda and Swahili. Although FDLR members do speak these languages, it is also a common dialect used in Goma and the surrounding area. FDLR have stated they did not carry out the attack.

Nor is the incident likely to be work of the so-called Islamic State's local proxy - Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP)<sup>3</sup> which tends to claim responsibility for such high-profile attacks very quickly. Indeed, several militia groups operate in and around Virunga, the area which lies along the DRC's borders with Rwanda and Uganda.

It appears most likely that the perpetrators were a local criminal gang or a militia unit who were carrying out an opportunistic kidnap, rather than a known militia group targeting a VIP.

Ambassador Attanasio had visited a WFP school canteen on the morning of 22 February and was travelling to the small town of Rutshuru to view a community feeding project. From there he reportedly intended to visit one of the main volcanic sites in the area.

There are conflicting accounts as to whether the local government authorities knew he was travelling in the area, though it is highly likely that they would have known as he was making a formal visit to a local school. The Governor of North Kivu, Carly Nzanzu Kasivita, said that the convoy was stopped when warning shots were fired. The driver was then reportedly killed in order to pressure the rest of the convoy to comply with the perpetrators, who were either looking to capture the staff in a kidnap for ransom or to take the personnel to an ATM, from where they would have been forced to withdraw money.

It is known that neither the Ambassador nor his designated Close Protection Officer or the local staff members were wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the WFP vehicles were not armoured which would have been normal Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) for all delegates / ambassadors in semi-permissive environments like this one. This relaxation may be the result of knowledge that the route travelled on – RN2 – is a road used by over 90 per cent of UN and aid organisations to travel to the north of the area. The road had also recently been downgraded by the UN from red to yellow, and therefore the WFP convoy would not have been required to have an escort from MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

The majority of aid organisations and diplomatic missions in DRC follow very similar security protocols to the UN. Roads designated as “red” routes in the DRC require all staff members to wear PPE (though drivers tend not to) and take a MONUSCO escort. “Yellow” routes need a two-car convoy. In some cases, travelling in an armoured car can draw further attention to the group.

This may explain why there was a clear emphasis by the planners in this instance on minimising the security level risk in the plan and so using little or no PPE, and traveling in “soft” cars, with no escort.

### Risk Profile

The Italian ambassador and his CPO had unique risk profiles: an Ambassador and other foreigners. Insecurity and violence in the Eastern DRC are very high - ACLED report 38 kidnap incidents of civilians between November 2020 and 2021 in North Kivu (see map on previous page) and this may well be an under reporting given communication difficulties and the possibility that many ransoms are not reported by the victim for legal or reputational reasons.

Although the ambassador was travelling in an aid convoy to visit a project, he and his entourage were still exposed to general risks faced by aid agencies operating in this area. While this violence has a massive impact on the local population, high profile persons are usually effectively shielded from these risks by the increased security measures used during their visits.

# Vigil InSight Incident Analysis

The data from Insecurity Insight on the Vigil InSight map below, clearly shows that local aid workers are at higher risk than international aid workers. In just under two years only one international aid worker has been killed or kidnapped, but 37 NGO staff members have been abducted.

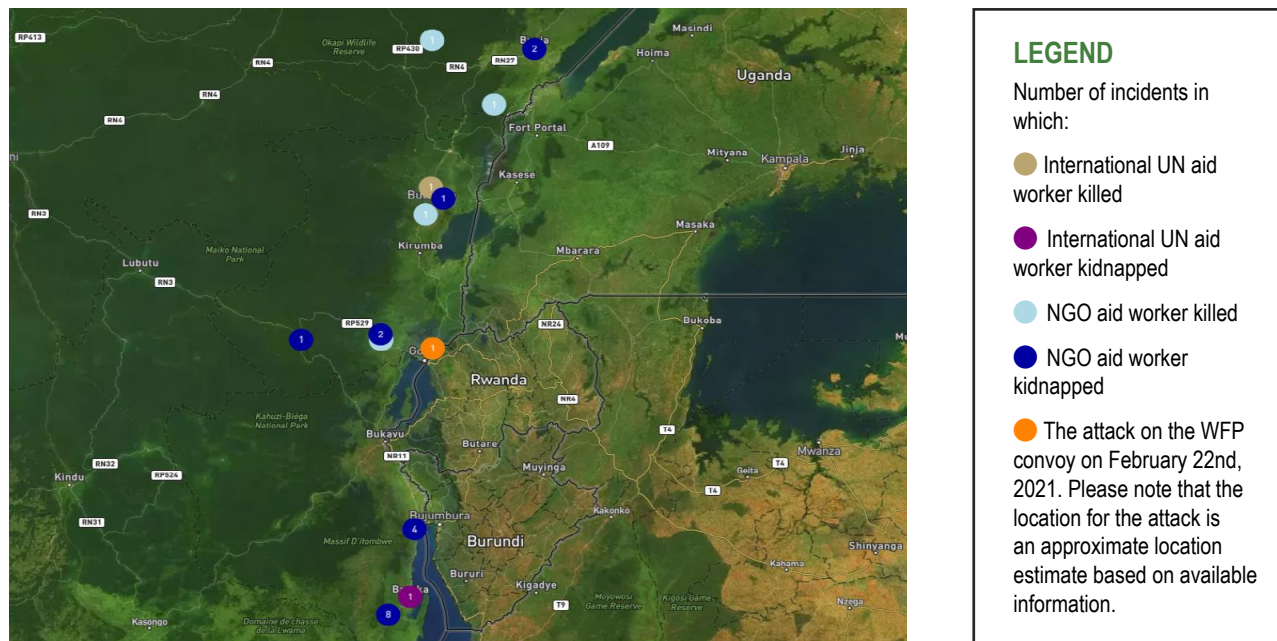
As a local employee of an aid agency, the driver's risk profile was influenced by the fact that the perpetrators recognized him as someone who spoke local languages and knew the area.

Global aid agency drivers are highly exposed to risk as they travel on routes in the Goma / North Kivu areas and drivers are often kidnapped along with other aid workers.

**Locations where NGO aid workers were killed or kidnapped between 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020**

**Locations where international UN staff members were killed or kidnapped between 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020**

**Location of the attack on the WFP convoy on 22 February 2021**



Vigil InSight: Insecurity Insight data<sup>4</sup> showing the number of incidents in which international UN staff members were killed/ kidnapped and NGO aid workers killed / kidnapped between 1 January and 31 December 2020. Note: this map shows incidents not the number of individuals affected.

## Previous Incidents

The tragic incident had similarities with an incident that affected an international NGO further north last year. On 16 September 2020, near Lubero town, North Kivu, a two-vehicle INGO convoy carrying four aid workers was ambushed by Mai Mai militia. One international NGO aid worker was killed, one seriously injured, and two others managed to escape unharmed and were found the following day in a nearby village. The vehicles, phones, and cash, were stolen.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, while ambushes, robberies and kidnappings are far too frequent in the Eastern DRC, tragic deaths during such incidents are not common.

Insecurity Insight documented 18 incidents of kidnappings of aid workers in 2020 (see map above), that affected at least 37 individuals associated with aid agencies. Most attacks occurred during road travel. However, there were no murders reported during these incidents except for the event on 16 September 2020. Most aid workers kidnapped were released some days after the incident, including drivers.

Insecurity Insight did however document four incidents in which aid workers were killed. Except for the latest incident involving Ambassador Attanasio and the incident on 16 September 2020, those murders did not take place during convoy road travel. Instead, local aid workers were caught in violence against civilians and attacks on settlements in Ituri province and Masisi territory, North Kivu.

Expatriates are much less frequently kidnapped or murdered than local aid staff. In 2019, a Cameroonian UN doctor was murdered in Butembo, North Kivu, and a Senegalese UN worker was kidnapped in Baraka, South Kivu (see map above).

## PREDICTIONS

- Although the DRC authorities have stated they will launch a strong security sweep of the area, this has been done before so previous evidence suggests this is unlikely to change the current situation on the ground over anything more than the coming days.
- Unless DRC receives additional international support for security improvements and measures to rehabilitate fighters, further kidnappings and attempted kidnaps will occur, possibly with similar outcomes.
- UNICEF has now suspended all activities in the area, so MONUSCO will likely be redeployed to secure RN2. This will likely exacerbate the current poor humanitarian situation in the area. Indeed, there are concerns that the Ebola outbreak in the Timbu area could now spread rapidly.
- Although MONUSCO is looking to secure RN2, it will take time for troops and transport to be deployed, so aid agencies will have to instigate high level security SOPs for the present time.
- Although ISCAP has not claimed the attack, there is evidence of their presence in Beni and, as with its parent organisation, the group has discussed launching attacks on diplomatic envoys and convoys from France and the US. This attack has already led to UN and aid agency travel being halted, limiting their humanitarian efforts in the region. Further attacks will certainly impede continued aid efforts.

## MITIGATION

The attack on the Ambassador's convoy was tragic. Such incidents can shift the emphasis on risk management for the whole aid sector. This particularly impacts local staff such as drivers or local CPOs who have a higher personal risk factor than VIPs, or international personnel. The DRC has now asked that all UN convoys give route card details (though this may contravene the terms of the Vienna Convention) and that PPE must be worn at all times. The UN and several INGOs have also stopped all traffic along RN2 until further notice.

Although aid agencies will need to make their own assessments of how to adjust their security strategies there are options available:

- **Consider wearing PPE in high-risk areas at all times, in particular for high level passengers or those exposed to particular risks, such as drivers.**
- **Even if the UN decreases a risk level from Red to Yellow, PPE is key.**
- **Routes should be varied if possible.**
- **Restrict circle of knowledge of travel for security communications.**
- **Use vehicle trackers/ check in with office.**
- **No social media surrounding travel for high-risk individuals.**
- **A strengthened emphasis on de-escalation and non-resistance during ambushes and kidnapping attempts.**



## About Vigil InSight

This incident analysis is part of Vigil InSight, a joint initiative by **HawkSight**, **DHC Gunn** and **Insecurity Insight**.

It is prepared from information available in local, national and international news outlets, consultations with key informants and data from Insecurity Insight **Aid in Danger** project and the **Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project** (ACLED).

The incidents reported are not a complete nor a representative list of all events that affected the provision of aid delivery and have not been independently verified.

All decisions made, on the basis of, or with consideration to, such information remains the responsibility of their respective organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) **database attribution policy**. Accessed 24 February 2021.

<sup>2</sup> The FDLR is an armed ethnic Hutu militia group opposed to ethnic Tutsi influence, and one of the last Rwandan factions active in Eastern DRC.

<sup>3</sup> ISCAP regards itself as part of the main Islamic State (IS) group that originated in Iraq and Syria. It is based mainly in the DRC, and Mozambique – though its strength, and extended presence in DRC is unknown. It pledged alliance to IS in November 2019, though despite some early successes – there is no evidence that it has established direct logistic connections with the parent group in Iraq and Syria.

<sup>4</sup> This map shows reported incidents in which NGO or UN staff members were killed or kidnapped in 2020. **Insecurity Insight** collated data from multiple public sources and confidential contributions from aid agencies. The data may differ from other sources. The data is part of the **Aid in Danger** project. For more information on Insecurity Insight visit our website on **Aid Security** and **Bi-weekly News Brief**, or **subscribe** for updates.

<sup>5</sup> Suggested citation: Insecurity Insight. 2020. **Aid in Danger Bi-weekly News Brief, 09-22 September 2020**. Geneva: Insecurity Insight, Aid in Danger Project.

