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Valuing a People-Centered Approach to the Protection of Civilians Following Peacekeeping Mission Withdrawal in Eastern DR Congo.

Precious Ayomide Kayode
International Relations

Information

Author: Precious Ayomide Kayode

Thesis Supervisor: Ingrid L.P. Nyborg

Faculty of Landscape and Society

Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Ås Norway.

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kayodeblessing63@gmail.com

Noragric Department of International Environment and Development Studies,

The Faculty of Landscape and Society

P.O. Box 5003 N-1432 Ås Norway

Tel.: +47 67 23 00 00

Internet: <https://www.nmbu.no/fakultet/landsam/institutt/noragric>

Declaration

I, Precious Ayomide Kayode, declare that this thesis is a result of my research, investigation, and findings. Sources of information that are not my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for an award of any type of degree.



Signature.....

Date 15/06/2024 Ås

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Abstract

In the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, ongoing cycles of conflict and violence have heightened the focus on civilian protection by peacekeeping missions. Despite the robust military efforts employed to address these needs, violence against civilians persists, leading to calls for the withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

This qualitative study involved interviewing civilians, MONUSCO personnel, and Congolese National Police representatives in Eastern DRC, alongside analyzing official UN policy documents to understand MONUSCO's organizational perspective. The research examined the security landscape for civilian protection and explored how the protective role of the Congolese National Police in Eastern DRC might be enhanced by adopting a people-centered approach amidst discussions of MONUSCO's potential withdrawal.

Grounded in human security theory and community-oriented policing framework, this study proposes establishing strong police-civilian relationships as a foundational step toward enhancing people-centered civilian protection.

The findings of this study suggest that adopting a people-centered approach can potentially enhance the effectiveness of local security forces in protecting civilians in Eastern DRC after the withdrawal of the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission. If the approach had been adopted to address violence against civilians in Eastern DRC, it might have led to fewer community-based conflicts and fewer protection needs among civilians. Therefore, the perspectives and experiences shared in this research are vital for developing longer-term people-centered protection strategies and solutions if conflicts and physical violence against civilians persist in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Keywords: *protection of civilians, policing, peacekeeping, physical violence, civilians, police, MONUSCO, United Nations, people-centered approach, peacekeeping withdrawal.*

Abbreviations

DRC	The Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUC	The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUSCO	The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
PoC	Protection of Civilians
UN	United Nations
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II
SDG	Sustainable Development
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NMBU	Norwegian University of Life Sciences
PNC	Congolese National Police
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

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1.0 Introduction

In a contemporary global context, the primary responsibility to protect civilians from mass atrocities, including genocides, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and physical violence during armed conflicts, rests with sovereign states (The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2023). However, the unending conflicts experienced by certain nations have compelled the deployment of international peacekeeping missions by the United Nations, with the approval of the host government as exemplified by instances in Mali and South Sudan, where conflicts have necessitated such interventions (United Nations, 2021; World Report, 2024). This response is also driven by the need to reduce all forms of violence and death of civilians in conflict as emphasized in the Sustainable Development Goal 16 (United Nations, n.d.).

The Democratic Republic of Congo, the second-largest African country, located in central Africa and previously referred to as “Zaire” is not excluded from this issue (Berwouts, 2017). For over two decades, certain regions have grappled with consistent conflicts and violence (Fraser, 2016). The unending conflicts have been driven by a history of political power struggles, natural resource abundance, and tensions stemming from the two Congo wars in 1996-1997 and 1998-2003 (Eriksen, 2009).

The United Nations peacekeeping mission MONUC was first deployed in 1999 with the initial responsibility of observing the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement following the Second Congo War of 1998-2003 (United Nations Security Council, 2022). However, as the conflict in the DRC escalated, the mission’s mandate expanded, leading to its transition to MONUSCO in 2010. MONUSCO’s new mandate, based on the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1925, emphasized the protection of civilians from physical threats and violence, as well as the provision of support to stabilize and achieve peace in the DRC (MONUSCO, 2021). Therefore, as part of the operations of the UN peacekeepers, the use of force was authorized to ensure effective and a more robust and proactive approach to safeguarding civilians from physical violence (MONUSCO, 2024).

By 2024, MONUSCO consisted of over 12,000 military forces and 1,597 police officers recruited and deployed from various countries to protect civilians in the DRC. (MONUSCO, 2024).

Although peacekeeping missions have typically exhibited the ability to promptly restore stability to nations experiencing armed conflicts according to Funk & Said (2010), this has not been the case in DRC. Despite efforts of the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission to protect civilians from physical violence such as reassessing mandates and increasing the capacity of military peacekeepers, the conflict persists, and the UN peacekeeping mission's protection role in the DRC falls short of expectations (Murphy, 2016; Sengenya, 2022). Particularly in the Eastern region which is the primary focus of this study, threats and attacks posed by rebel groups have been a major factor in exposing the civilian population to physical violence to date (Center for Preventive Action, 2023). Moreover, the role of MONUSCO's military component, popularly known as the "blue helmets", in protecting civilians has spurred violent protests on the ground (Cyuzuzo, 2022; Princewill, 2023). These demonstrations are fueled by perceptions of deteriorating security conditions and allegations of atrocities by peacekeepers against civilians. As such, a perceived gap in the effectiveness of protection efforts in the DRC context exists (Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2022).

Faced with growing public unrest, the DRC government announced its plans to accelerate the withdrawal of longstanding troops from the eastern region by the end of 2024. This was during a speech at the 78th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2023, where he referred to the alleged "MONUSCO peacekeeping mission's inability, despite its 25-year presence and deployment in various forms, to effectively protect civilians and end tensions perpetrated by armed and rebel groups, contributing to instability within the DRC and across the Great Lakes region" (UN News, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/09/1141182>).

This decision has been reported widely by prominent sources such as Al Jazeera (2024) and Agence France-Presse (2023), among others. According to the Center for Civilians in Conflict (2022), the government intends to speed up withdrawal by revising the 2021 Joint Transition Strategy, which was initially established to oversee the mission's withdrawal process.

The recent developments mentioned above signal the intent to entrust the responsibility of protecting civilians to the Congolese Security Forces. This prompts questions not only about ways to minimize protection gaps but also about ways to improve civilian security in the region.

The focus on protection gaps has, however, overshadowed any interest in how local security might be improved after a takeover by the Congolese Security Forces. For example, the possibility of applying a people-centered approach by the local security forces to address the protection needs and concerns of civilians has hardly been explored. To better understand the challenges and opportunities of such a possibility, there is a need to examine not only official UN policy and the perceptions of MONUSCO representatives, but the perceptions of civilians and Congolese police officers as well on the protection needs of civilians in Eastern DRC, and the extent to which a people-centered protection approach might respond to these needs when MONUSCO is no longer present.

This study, therefore, serves as a starting point for examining how the present post-MONUSCO withdrawal landscape in the DRC might offer opportunities for local security forces, with a specific focus on the Congolese Police, to insert themselves and take up the physical protection of civilian's role by applying a people-centered approach.

1.1 Main Research Question

What potential might the adoption of a people-centered approach by local security forces hold for enhancing civilian protection in Eastern DRC, particularly following the withdrawal of MONUSCO?

This research has two objectives.

Objective 1: To examine the security landscape for the physical protection of civilians prior to the withdrawal of the MONUSCO forces from Eastern DRC.

- Sub-RQ. How do Congolese civilians experience and address conflict-related physical violence in Eastern DRC?
- Sub-RQ. How do Civilians, Congolese National police, and MONUSCO representatives perceive the role of MONUSCO peacekeepers in protecting civilians in Eastern DRC?

Objective 2: To examine the perspectives of civilians, MONUSCO personnel, and the Congolese National Police on how adopting a people-centered approach might enhance the physical protection of civilians by the Congolese National Police following MONUSCO's withdrawal from Eastern DRC.

- Sub-RQ. How do Civilians, MONUSCO's representatives, and Congolese National Police perceive the role of the police in protecting civilians in Eastern DRC?
- Sub-RQ. How might adopting a people-centered approach contribute to the physical protection of civilians after MONUSCO's withdrawal from the Eastern DRC?

1.2 Organization of the Study

This thesis comprises six chapters, each dedicated to addressing the main and sub-research questions which encompass how the adoption of a people-centered approach by local security forces might enhance civilian protection in Eastern DRC, particularly following the withdrawal of MONUSCO.

Chapter One serves as the introduction to the research, laying the foundation for an exploration into the prevalent challenges surrounding the physical protection of civilians in Eastern DRC, it also covers the research questions and objectives of the study, as well as provides an overview of the organization of the study.

Chapter Two covers the literature review, which entails a review of existing research on peacekeeping and the protection of civilians in the DRC, the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping roles in the DRC, policing in the DRC, and people-centered policing initiatives in the DRC. The chapter also sheds light on the importance and limitations of adopting a people-centered approach and includes the theoretical frameworks for this research.

Chapter Three focuses on the research approach, sampling method, data collection and analysis, validity and reliability, researcher reflexivity, ethical procedures, and study limitations.

Chapter Four delves into an in-depth exploration of Congo's historical background. This is followed by the presentation of findings in Chapter Five which were also discussed alongside various sub-themes. The themes explain why and how a people-centered approach to civilian protection from physical violence is important in the DRC post-UN peacekeeping landscape.

Furthermore, Chapter Six encompasses the study's conclusions and recommendations.

2.0 Literature Review

This section reviews the existing literature on peacekeeping and the protection of civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

2.1 Peacekeeping and Protection of Civilians in the DRC

According to P. D. Williams (2023), among other tasks, peacekeeping troops are deployed to physically protect civilians in contexts where conflict is present. Additionally, the “presence of peacekeepers deters the onset of conflicts and the activities of local armed groups” (Ruggeri et al., 2016).

The DRC has been a centerpiece for peacekeeping operations, leading to deploying international and regional troops and contributing resources from various countries (Copeland, 2012). According to Ahere (2012), peacekeeping efforts in the DRC have not only involved the deployment of UN missions but also contributions from the African Union (AU) and other sub-regional actors in the pursuit of peace. Examples of regional peacekeeping interventions include the East African Community (EAC) collaborating with the DRC government to provide troops and support for achieving peace and security in the DRC (Adolphe, 2023).

The United Nations is notably known for its involvement in peacekeeping and civilian protection efforts in the DRC. Instances of their contributions in the DRC entail the deployment of peacekeepers to support the DRC army in battlefield engagements and peacekeeping operations (Verweijen, 2017). “To combat armed groups and minimize threats against civilians, the United Nations deployed the Force Intervention Brigade in 2013. This brigade included troops from neighboring countries such as Tanzania, South Africa, and Malawi” (Kochani, 2021).

Scholars who have scrutinized the United Nations peacekeeping mission known as MONUSCO in the DR Congo have raised significant concerns. These concerns revolve not only around the challenges related to implementing protection mandates but also about effectively translating these mandates into tangible actions on the ground (Kjeksrud & Ravndal, 2011).

To buttress this point, in the context of DR Congo, Scholars assert that “there is a growing discourse regarding the complexity of the issues surrounding the practical application of the Protection of civilians in practice” (Rolfe, 2011). Both military troops and civilian mission personnel, including the early European Union military operation outside Europe operating under the UN charter, followed by the establishment of MONUC and subsequently MONUSCO (Hellmüller, 2014), are frequently deployed with the mission of protecting civilians, however, it is important to acknowledge that peacekeeping missions often grapple with significant challenges in fulfilling these mandates. One key challenge stems from the unrealistic expectation that they can always safeguard all civilians and vice versa (Protection of Civilians Mandate, n.d.), and this complex reality raises questions about the feasibility of fulfilling the mandates and protecting civilians adequately.

On the other hand, there is a growing sense of exhaustion and frustration among the government, peacekeepers, and the civilian population in Eastern DRC due to the prolonged progress in establishing security and peace (Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2019).

The literature collectively implies that the ongoing debate regarding the effectiveness of the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC primarily revolves around several key aspects.

2.1.1 Effectiveness of the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC

Kochani (2021) holds that although military strategies like patrolling, escorting aid organizations, and keeping a presence among civilians to ensure deterrence have contributed to the success of MONUSCO's peacekeeping mission in the DRC, several factors limit the effectiveness of MONUSCO's troops in the Eastern Region. As such, Prakash's study (2022) described the DRC as a testing ground for UN peacekeeping, having witnessed the transitions of three major peacekeeping operations. Congolese civilians often perceive peacekeepers as ineffective in achieving lasting peace and security, despite their mandated responsibilities (Berwouts, 2017).

Drawing on empirical analysis, De Carvalho and Sending (2013) also emphasized that peacekeeping missions face various challenges in implementing effective peacekeeping operations, and the challenges in implementing the Protection of Civilians (PoC) transcend conventional issues which cut across a struggle for conceptual clarity, resource constraints, training deficiencies, and coordination gaps during peace operations.

To support this claim, Bope (2023) asserts that “debates concerning the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping in the DRC revolve around the UN's ability to establish lasting peace”. According to Bayo (2012), while peacekeepers play a role in maintaining peace, using MONUSC as a case study, the ineffectiveness of UN peacekeeping efforts in the DRC can be attributed to the inability to disarm rebel factions and safeguard civilians. These are influenced by political dynamics and the vested interests of great powers (Bayo, 2012).

On the other hand, Mumanya (2018) posits that UN peacekeeping soldiers in the DRC have faced criticism for perpetrating sexual abuse and exploitation against civilians, actions that diminish the effectiveness of the UN peacekeeping mission. Meanwhile, Adolphe (2023) took the stance that criticisms of peacekeeping effectiveness in the DRC stem from misunderstandings and confusion regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of the DRC government and the UN peacekeeping mission. He argued that “a peacekeeping mission should not be viewed as a replacement for state authority (Adolphe, 2023)”.

Vermeij et al. (2022) also conducted a study to assess the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations. Through over 100 in-depth interviews with UN representatives across multiple missions and headquarters, the study emphasized the need for adaptability to evolving conflict dynamics and flexibility in addressing key protection challenges. These findings showcase the importance of adjusting strategies to effectively support peacekeeping transitions and enhance engagement in critical protection issues.

To offer insights on how to improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions, Rolfe (2011) also highlighted the importance of “partnership, mutual planning, adequate resource allocation, and effective communication as critical elements for the successful protection of civilians within the framework of a peacekeeping mission”.

The reviews collectively highlight the ongoing debate surrounding the effectiveness of peacekeeping in the DRC, with much of the literature focusing on discussions concerning UN peacekeeping missions in the region. However, a notable gap exists as most literature overlooks considerations of civilians' perspectives on how to improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping and the protection of civilians following the withdrawal of UN peacekeeping missions.

In essence, the existing study predominantly involves assessing the effectiveness of these roles within the framework of UN peacekeeping missions. However, the lack of in-depth information from civilians in conflict-affected communities where peacekeepers operate prompts the need to review literature focusing on people-centered policing in the DRC.

2.2 Policing in the DRC

The Congolese National Police, responsible for upholding law and order in the DRC, evolved from the colonial-era gendarmerie, which was originally composed of soldiers. Over time, this institution transitioned into a tool for maintaining the survival of the DRC government (Mayamba, 2012). Thus, the role of the Congolese Police includes ensuring public security and order, as well as protecting high-ranking officials, among other responsibilities (Kahombo, 2022).

In a study by Tar and Dawud (2022), which examined policing and insecurity in Africa using the DRC and other African countries as case studies, it was revealed that the DRC police force ranks among the bottom five police forces globally. The study criticized the policing strategies employed by the DRC police, highlighting significant issues in their approach to maintaining security.

Furthermore, the historical composition of the police force in the DRC, initially comprising former soldiers, has profoundly shaped the policing approach of the PNC. “The UN peacekeeping mission has played a crucial role in training the police and supporting continuous police reform efforts within the country” (Hoebeke, 2007).

In the DRC, there is widespread distrust and lack of confidence in the Congolese Police. Scheye’s (2011) study revealed that although the police contribute to disarming armed militia groups, residents in places like Bukavu feel abandoned and insecure. The study draws attention to “the role of donor assistance in enhancing justice and security services while highlighting the tendency of initiatives to collapse once donor funding is withdrawn” (Scheye, 2011).

Furthermore, studies reveal a thin line between the police providing security and contributing to insecurity and violence. Verweijen, J. (2019) argued that the closeness of the police to civilians in the DRC offers opportunities for building a sense of communal relationship and enhancing mutual understanding. However, this proximity can also lead to increased insecurity and violence, as the police may become accomplices in violent acts alongside civilians in various ways. This highlights the complex nature of policing in the DRC.

2.2.1 People-Centered Policing Initiatives in the DRC

The study on peacekeeping reveals that it is not solely limited to the participation of military peacekeepers but also encompasses contributions from police forces (C. T. Hunt, 2022).

People-centered approaches are not a recent addition to the UN system (Mahmoud, 2018), and neither is the idea of people-centeredness new to the Congolese National Police forces as viewed through the lens of Quenza (2023).

In Wisler et al.'s (2019) research, which focused on community policing as an initiative to enhance police reforms in the DRC, he found that community policing has been adopted at a slow rate and primarily through donor-funded projects in the DRC. His study highlighted that the Congolese National Police were involved in implementing this approach by equipping officers for better communication in the Mbuji-Mayi region. Furthermore, Baudouin (2016) highlighted in her study that community policing improved police-community confidence and partnership. On the other hand, Congolese Proximity Policing, also referred to as *Police de Proximité*, involves "restoring the police-community relationship, building police-community confidence, and promoting the participative role of the population in decision-making" as highlighted by Mbuya (2014). It reshaped policing philosophy, moving away from police officers viewing themselves as superior to the population, towards fostering a closer relationship with the people.

In Thill and Cimanuka's (2019) study, the establishment of the CLSP (Local Council for Proximity Security) in Bukavu, Matadi, and Kananga provinces resulted from ongoing reforms within the PNC (Congolese National Police). This approach, based on human security principles, mirrors community-oriented policing by integrating society, police, and justice contributions to address local security challenges. It required practical arrangements and compromises to adapt to insecurity despite systemic security strategies. However, Thill and Cimanuka (2019) argued that while successful in enhancing police-community relations and engagement, this approach faced challenges due to resource scarcity and failure to grasp the purpose of the approach.

Therefore, it is evident that various strategies can be employed to adopt a people-centered approach to policing in the DRC. These strategies, such as enhancing community engagement, improving communication effectiveness, fostering mutual collaboration, building trust, and nurturing positive police-civilian relationships, are vital as portrayed in

existing literature (Felix & Hilgers, 2020; Nyborg, 2020; Henigson, 2022; Henigson, 2020; Coning & Gelot, 2020).

On the other hand, there remains a significant gap in understanding. Further exploration is necessary to clarify what a people-centered approach entails, as highlighted by Thill and Cimanuka (2019), and how its adoption for the protection of civilians in the DRC can be enhanced.

2.3 Toward a People-Centered Approach to Civilian Physical Protection

Since effective protection is not guaranteed by the mere presence of militarized peacekeepers, various scholarly perspectives discussing a more people-centered approach will be reviewed. Additionally, the lack of focus on individuals in traditional security frameworks has led to the development of people-centered approaches, which aim to ensure security at the individual level (Ikeda, 2019).

In economics, a strategy's effectiveness is often measured by its focus on being people-centered and its aim to maximize individual welfare (Martins et al., 2010). On the other hand, Mugumbate et al. (2021) described people-centeredness as an approach that entails satisfying human needs and their well-being effectively, not just for a short period. Therefore, “all aspects of life must be viewed with humanity in mind” (Mugumbate et al., 2021).

In the view of Crampton (2023), a people-centered approach was identified as a problem-solving approach that places priority on individual needs, desires, and experiences at the core of decision-making processes. Similarly, Ndu et al. (2022) emphasized that the success of policies and interventions is based on meaningful human involvement. They argue that a people-centered approach should be the cornerstone of any intervention, highlighting the necessity of considering individual goals, values, needs, and preferences that differ from person to person. In addition to prioritizing individual needs, desires, and experiences, Crampton (2023) maintained that individuals belong to social groups and communities. Therefore, solutions should be tailored accordingly to accommodate both the unique experiences of individuals and the collective dynamics of these social contexts. The assertion that the unique experiences and perspectives of individuals are central to the people-centered approach is evident, as Quenza (2023) characterizes the idea as a humanistic approach focusing on individual subjective understandings and interpretations of their world.

On the other hand, Sedra (2022) argued that a people-centered approach functions as a framework for balancing the objective of strengthening state institutions and legal frameworks within a society, while simultaneously developing a security and justice system that aligns with the needs of individuals and fosters community participation. Therefore, in analyzing the utilization of a people-centered approach to tackle flood risks in Sendai, Wolff (2021) suggested that employing community-based strategies might further promote the implementation of a people-centered approach.

Similarly, Henigson's (2020) report provides insights into enhancing community engagement as a means of implementing people-centered approaches to protection within UN peacekeeping missions. Therefore, closely associated with the idea, Julian's (2024) research on the role of unarmed civilian peacekeeping emphasized the significance of establishing strong relationships with civilians, highlighting their crucial role in fostering not only the absence of violence but also overall security and safety within their communities.

According to Gray (2022), acknowledging preexisting relationships among actors plays a role in understanding how their ideas influence the pathways to peace and protection. Therefore, as Coning and Gelot (2020) put it, the effectiveness of this approach will be assessed based on the operation's impact on the daily lives of the people it aims to protect and assist.

2.3.1 Limitations of Adopting People-Centered Protection Approaches

It is crucial to however acknowledge that while this approach has demonstrated its applicability across diverse fields and situations, certain scholars have also identified potential constraints associated with its implementation in practice. In conflict-affected contexts, the influence of self-serving elites who often can influence and engage with international actors is highlighted by Karlsrud (2015). These elites may not genuinely advocate for the interests or well-being of the people. Mahmoud's (2018) study also emphasized the challenge of determining and engaging with elites and civil society representatives who genuinely represent the voices of the people on the ground. Therefore, in such environments, a people-centered approach as articulated by InterAction (2023), becomes applicable. The approach entails genuinely engaging with communities and prioritizing their concerns, capacities, rights, and dignities.

Likewise, ongoing partnerships and communication are important components of this approach (Moore et al., 2016).

According to Sedra (2022), in the context of adopting a people-centered approach to security, it is crucial to acknowledge the variability of contexts. While lessons learned and best practices can offer insights, it is essential to recognize that what works in one context may not necessarily apply in another. Understanding the local context becomes paramount for UN missions to prevent causing more harm to the people they aim to assist. As a result, the transplantation of such an approach is often criticized and unwelcome by those advocating for a people-centered vision (Sedra, 2022). Additionally, Quenza (2023) highlights the complexity and multifaceted nature of the approach, emphasizing the need for further research employing diverse methodologies. This comprehensive understanding requires significant time investment (Moore et al., 2016).

Although scholars such as Coning and Gelot (2020) and Quenza (2023) have highlighted the significance of adopting a people-centered approach in peace operations, their study also suggests the necessity for additional research in the field. Furthermore, Mahmoud (2018) noted the challenges associated with people-centered approaches, such as “the potential inadequacy of local civil society actors and elites in accurately representing the voices of the local population”. His study also highlighted the necessity for a more comprehensive study of local realities, moving beyond solely focusing on the drivers of conflict to consider the perspectives of the communities themselves.

These observations therefore indicate a potential gap in literature, suggesting an opportunity for further research focusing on perspectives regarding the potential of adopting a people-centered approach by local security forces to enhance the physical protection of civilians following the withdrawal of the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission in Eastern DRC.

2.4 Theoretical Framework and Concepts for the Research

To determine the theoretical framework that will inform this research which is focused on valuing a people-centered approach to the protection of civilians in Eastern DR Congo, this section will examine existing theories and frameworks that emphasize the centrality of individuals and communities in civilian protection efforts.

Drawing on the existing ways the Protection of Civilians has been understood, this research will employ the Community-oriented policing framework, complemented by the Human security theory.

2.4.1 Perspectives on Civilian Protection in Contemporary Peace Operations

This section explores the diversity of scholarly perspectives on the protection of civilians.

Numerous scholars specialized in peace and conflict studies have offered diverse perspectives, contributing to the diverse understanding of the protection of civilians in peacekeeping missions.

According to Kjeksrud and Ravndal, the protection of civilians is viewed as an inherent and essential responsibility of UN peacekeeping missions (Kjeksrud et al., 2011). The aftermath of the Cold War prompted deliberations on the impacts of armed conflicts on civilians, and the negative impacts of war on delivering humanitarian aid to affected populations (Gordon, 2013).

De Carvalho and Sending (2013) emphasized the widespread impact of conflicts in various regions worldwide. As a result, the Protection of Civilians has evolved as a priority within the UN peacekeeping strategy and operation since 1999 (De Carvalho et al., 2013). Funk & Said (2010) described the Protection of Civilians as a shared responsibility between the military, civilian, and police components of UN peacekeeping operations.

Furthermore, while PoC is viewed as a shared responsibility, Gray (2022) asserts that the Protection of Civilians in UN peacekeeping is a joint effort, involving active participation from peacekeepers and the vulnerable civilian population. This effort “involves using any means necessary including the use of force to prevent, deter, or respond to threats of physical

violence against the civilian population within areas of deployment, with consent from the host country” (United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2023).

In contrast, the research conducted by (Phayal & Prins, 2019; Hultman et al., 2014; Schütte, 2014) portrayed the protection of civilians as primarily military. In a quantitative study conducted by Phayal and Prins (2019), it was acknowledged that although both military and non-military components of a UN mission contribute to the protection of civilians and peace in conflict areas, the protection of civilians in the battle frontline leans towards military peacekeepers.

Similarly, Hultman et al. (2014) focused on the changing nature of contemporary conflicts and peacekeeping and the role of peacekeeping forces compared to police and unarmed mission personnel. To maximize deterrence, military peacekeepers in the conflict context are expected to adopt a threatening posture, by employing approaches including “protection by deterrence, engagement, and prevention” (Schütte, 2014). This idea was critiqued by Tardy (2011). In his view, “the robust approach in practice can be perceived as a substitute for the lack of sufficiently developed strategy by the UN peacekeeping missions”.

Although Phayal and Prins (2019) proposed that although peacekeeper deployments decrease civilian killings by rebel groups, there is a lack of evidence indicating a decrease in killings by the country’s armed forces. This raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of a robust and heavily armed military approach in addressing violence and threats against civilians (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2017). Although, based on the study conducted by Suhrke (2015), military approaches to civilian protection may curb violence against civilians, but can also result in unintended civilian casualties. This highlights the potential implications of relying solely on military strategies for civilian protection.

Hunt and Zimmerman (2019) offered a comparative analysis of UN peace operations in conflict contexts. They presented the protection of civilians (PoC) as a “complex” and “wicked problem”, characterized by the high expectations required of peacekeepers. According to Berdal (2016), these protection expectations often prompt civilians to seek refuge in areas where peacekeepers are present thereby mounting more pressure and risks on the civilians and the already overstretched peacekeepers. The role of physically protecting civilians cannot be solely assigned to the military component. Although peacekeeping military forces occasionally engage in community engagement in conflict hotspots given how the access of the UN civilian component to the communities may be limited depending on the intensity of the conflict, effective engagement by peacekeeping military forces in conflict zones is often hindered by the lack of contextual knowledge and language skills (Henigson, 2022).

The military's capability to employ proactive and robust measures to deter threats to civilian protection is undeniable, yet has its implications as noted by (Suhrke, 2015).

Drawing on these perspectives, it is evident that UN peacekeeping missions as a whole and their components are responsible for ensuring the protection of civilians with the support of the host government. It is equally important to recognize that the term "peacekeepers" often solely denotes the military component, highlighting their function in offering physical security at the front lines. The literature reflects conflicting opinions on the protection of civilians which calls for examining how the effectiveness of the role is viewed by scholars.

The gaps in understanding lie in the limited perspectives on civilian protection, which have hindered efforts to rethink and enhance the quality of physical protection for civilians. This paper emphasizes the importance of adopting approaches that prioritize the voices of individuals within their communities in civilian protection efforts. However, to address this gap, it is essential to examine theoretical frameworks that facilitates bridging this gap.

2.4.2 Positive Peace Theory

Sharp's exploration of Positive Peace Theory emphasizes the significance of pursuing sustainable outcomes in peacekeeping missions. He highlighted prioritizing well-being, cooperation, and positive social relationships within peace missions (Sharp, 2020).

Originally developed by Johan Galtung in the 1960s, the Positive Peace theory advocates for sustainable approaches to promoting peace by addressing the root causes of violence and conflict embedded in social structures.

Although the Positive Peace frameworks may not explicitly focus on protecting civilians from violence, they provide a valuable lens for understanding and addressing the root causes of violence deeply entrenched within societal structures (Gleditsch et al., 2014). However, to critically examine this notion, Hansen (2016) argues that Positive Peace can be reframed to encompass promoting peace among individuals, among different groups, and across larger systems. This can be achieved through increased community engagement, dialogue, and the practice of non-violence, among other methods.

While Positive Peace theory offers an initial exploration of the theoretical framework in this study, it may fall short of fully addressing the need for direct protection of civilians from violence. Its emphasis on transforming societal structures linked to violence may overlook the immediate security concerns of vulnerable populations. Thus, a comprehensive approach to civilian protection may require examining additional theoretical frameworks.

2.4.3 Feminist Security Theory

Feminist security theory, as highlighted by Tickner & Sjoberg (2011), redefined protection by prioritizing vulnerable individuals and recognizing underlying threats beyond the absence of conflicts.

This perspective broadens the scope of International Relations and Security Studies, emphasizing gender dynamics and the targeting of females in conflicts, while also stressing the significance of local-level actors in shaping protection efforts, particularly for women (Donais & Murray, 2021).

Building upon the Feminist framework, Gray (2022) conducted a study on "protection as connection" using feminist relational theory. The research disclosed that protecting civilians extends beyond conventional military efforts, emphasizing proactive and inclusive measures, particularly for women perceived as vulnerable in conflict situations. However, it is essential to note that understanding who exactly civilians are in conflict-affected contexts remains a topic of ongoing debate among scholars.

According to International Humanitarian Law, civilians are entitled to protection in conflicts (Médecins Sans Frontières, n.d.), provided they refrain from involving themselves as combatants (Alexander, 2021).

Similarly, in UN peacekeeping operations, civilians are individuals not engaged in hostilities or affiliated with armed groups, as outlined by the Protection of Civilians (PoC) mandate (United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2023). Additionally, within UN peacekeeping frameworks, civilians are understood as non-combatant personnel supporting missions (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-a). On the other hand, from a gendered lens, civilians are conceptualized as women, children, and the elderly who are disproportionately affected by the violence and instability of conflict (Gray, 2022).

The Cambridge Dictionary offers a concise definition, describing “civilians as individuals who are not part of the police or armed forces” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). Samset (2010) offered a new perspective on defining civilians. In his analysis, the discourse on protecting civilians often assumes that civilians mainly comprise women and children, who are perceived as vulnerable in conflict situations. However, while civilians do include women and children, overlooking the identification of men as civilians and neglecting to protect them from threats and violence, as is done for women, could heighten the risks faced by civilian women and children (Samset, 2010).

On the other hand, a study conducted by Balcells and Stanton (2021), which delved into violence against civilians in armed conflicts, emphasized the pivotal role of civilians in wartime violence. The study shed more light on the diversity among civilians, implying that they encompass individuals with varied characteristics and motives. For this reason, in the scholar's analysis, civilians should not be perceived through a single lens but rather recognized as actors with differing roles, experiences, and characteristics in conflict settings. Therefore, for this study, civilians are referred to as all members of the Congolese civilian population who are not engaged as combatants in the armed conflict.

Furthermore, feminist theorists provided an alternative view by pointing out the need for more just and equitable outcomes for the vulnerable in conflicts (Tickner & Sjoberg, 2011). Therefore, in the context of this study, the Feminist security theory closely intersects with the theory of Human Security. According to Christie (2010), human security theory and feminist scholarship share a common ground, particularly emphasizing the varied impacts of war and conflict on individuals and underlining the necessity of comprehending security through the perspectives of the vulnerable. Additionally, Feminist IR theorists challenged the conventional idea of warfare and security which portrays military strength as a means of protection but overlooks the vulnerability to non-military dangers which may also pose threats to protection (Åse & Wendt, 2021).

Therefore, while Feminist Security Theory significantly contributes to understanding the gendered dimensions of security and advocating for the inclusion of marginalized voices (Ailwood et al., 2022), it is not entirely sufficient for a people-centered approach to the protection of civilians. A people-centered approach necessitates a more comprehensive framework that includes the diverse and intersecting needs of all individuals affected by conflict. While the Feminist Security Theory provides a foundational understanding of why

the voices of the vulnerable are marginalized, it is important to incorporate broader human security perspectives to fully understand the complexities and needs of civilian protection in conflict and peacekeeping contexts.

2.4.4 Human Security Theory

Understanding the protection of civilians through the lens of the Human security theory points out the significance of building connections with individuals for effective protection outcomes (Ospina, 2020).

Existing studies argued that the success of a UN mission should be assessed based on the positive improvements in the daily lives of the people it aims to assist (Mahmoud & Mechoulan, 2018). Therefore, the Human Security theory goes beyond the mere absence of conflict within a state; it acknowledges a range of concerns encompassing economic, health, environmental, and political factors. It asserts that individuals within a state should be safeguarded from these threats to their well-being (Rodgers & Crawford, 2021). Bajpai's (2003) study discovered that addressing threats to personal safety with force is not considered effective. Therefore, human security is viewed as the protection and freedom of individuals from threats of violence and harm.

Jacob's (2014) study highlights the correlation between the notion of “people-centered security” and the broader concept of human security. His critique emphasizes the necessity for a more holistic approach to security, surpassing the conventional depiction of human security solely as “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”. Rather, security should encompass addressing the multifaceted needs and realities of populations affected by conflict (Jacob, 2014). Building on this idea, the human security theory implies that individuals in a society can engage in their daily routines and pursuits without the threat of violence or harassment even in the absence of conflict (Jarstad et al., 2019). Therefore, in this theoretical framework, the concept of security, while distinct from protection, is linked to the idea of prioritizing the safety and well-being of civilians, even in the aftermath of conflicts.

2.4.5 Community-Oriented Policing

Conventional peacekeeping operations typically focus on state-centric models, state-centric approaches, and military deployment (Osland & Peter, 2021). Yet, it is increasingly recognized that states themselves can perpetrate violence against their people, eroding trust within local communities toward peacekeeping missions tasked with civilian protection (CIVIC & PAX, 2021). This lack of emphasis on people has led to the development of new, people-centered approaches that deliver security at the individual level (Ikeda, 2019).¹⁹

The adoption of a community-oriented policing (COP) framework, as presented in the findings of the ICT4COP project, is crucial for improving the effectiveness of civilian protection efforts by the Congolese National Police in this study (ICT4COP, 2020).

While Community-Oriented Policing (COP) and Community Policing (CP) share some similarities, they have distinct focuses and approaches. Community policing emphasizes organizational strategies that support partnerships between police and communities and problem-solving to address the root causes of community issues (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2012). In contrast, COP places a stronger emphasis on a proactive, problem-solving approach tailored to the specific security needs and priorities of the community.

The idea of community-oriented policing (COP) was developed in the 1970s in the United States, and it has since been practically grounded in reshaping policing services across various contexts. According to Felix and Hilgers (2020), COP focuses on shifting from reactive to preventive approaches to policing and emphasizes the importance of police-community relations in practice. In a study by Bahadar et al. (2019), Community-oriented policing is described as “a philosophy and an organizational strategy that promotes collaboration between police and communities, aimed at enhancing security, preventing crime, and improving protection efforts, among other efforts.

Therefore, the implementation of COP varies depending on the specific context, highlighting the lack of a uniform understanding. This argument aligns with Ingrid's study, where she highlights the diverse interpretations and applications of COP. This variability may result in shortcomings or offer insights for enhancing human security (L. P. Nyborg, 2019).

By challenging traditional, militarized approaches, COP emphasizes mutual collaboration, community engagement, and trust-building between the police and the community (Nyborg, 2020). This shift acknowledges the limitations of harsh strategies and emphasizes the importance of community-oriented solutions to address the root causes of threats to civilians. To explain further, it is essential to note that the COP approach proves effective when it prioritizes the establishment of mutual trust, effective communication, transparency, and the management of community expectations (Henigson, 2022). This emphasis on community engagement through Community-Oriented Policing aligns closely with the idea of a people-centered approach to the protection of civilians referred to as people-centered policing in this research and is discussed in the following section.

2.4.6 People-Centered Policing

The idea of people-centeredness, also known as person-centeredness, is widely recognized among practitioners across diverse fields and has found application in numerous fields of study, including psychology, social work, management, and psychotherapy, among others (Lux et al., 2013). According to Allen (2022), people in a society can potentially contribute to peace. Therefore, a people-centered approach calls for focusing on individuals and groups of people in a society, regardless of their level of influence. This is influenced by the understanding that people can positively impact peace efforts and offer hope for conflict-affected contexts striving for peace and stability.

A central idea frequently highlighted by scholars is that the people-centered approach entails placing individuals at the forefront of strategies and solutions to problems across diverse contexts. In UN peace operations, a people-centered approach emphasizes prioritizing the safety of individuals and protecting them from violence. Therefore, the civilian component/Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs), of the UN mission are often at the forefront of implementing this approach by fostering dialogue, mediating conflicts, defusing tensions, and advocating for local leaders' collaboration to protect civilians (Razza, 2018).

On the other hand, from a sustaining peace perspective, a people-centered approach is perceived as a bottom-up strategy that enables local communities to partake in decision-making processes, essential for ensuring sustainable peace and preventing the recurrence of conflict (Mahmoud & Mechoulan, 2018).

Therefore, the use of Community-Oriented Policing (COP) serves as a guiding framework for the police to foster community engagement, facilitating a deeper understanding and response to the protection needs and threats faced by community members. This is achievable by prioritizing increased and respectful engagement (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2017).

Hence, considering the physical protection of civilians by the local security actors following the withdrawal of an international peacekeeping mission, this study proposes a fresh perspective of people-centered policing that extends beyond preventive, military, and international efforts, and prioritizes the voices and needs of civilians affected by conflicts. While the approach may seem partially related to local actors in a community, it places minorities and underrepresented voices at its core (Mahmoud & Mechoulan, 2018).

In this study, a people-centered approach to the physical protection of civilians by the Congolese police is framed as identifying and addressing cycles of violence and protection threats against civilians by fostering mutual relationships, mutual collaboration, community engagement, and trust-building between the police and civilians. This approach is termed “people-centered policing”. By prioritizing the needs and perspectives of civilians, this approach seeks to develop more sustainable and effective responses to protect civilians in conflict-affected contexts.

This interpretation merges insights from the podcast episode "People-centered Peacekeeping" from the PAX Civilian Protection series (Episode #3 - Season 1, Episode 3), with the understanding of community-oriented policing as addressed in relevant research (Nyborg, 2020).

3.0 Research Approach

In qualitative research, the complexity of certain experiences cannot be fully captured through numerical data alone (Clark et al., 2021). Given the research objectives and questions centered around the exploration of a people-centered approach to the protection of civilians by the Congolese National Police, this study adopts the qualitative descriptive approach design as proposed by Sandelowski (2000). This research design was “useful for its ability to capture descriptions and experiences based on the perspectives of research participants” (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024).

A qualitative descriptive design is a “research design used in qualitative research to provide varying descriptions of research participant’s experiences and perceptions, particularly in areas where little is known about the research topic” (Doyle et al., 2019). It captures “rich descriptions of a research topic directly from participants, offering valuable insights for developing interventions or policies and enhancing existing knowledge” (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009).

Given the complexity of the topic and the need to capture diverse perspectives, a qualitative descriptive design is deemed appropriate. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of various viewpoints and experiences related to conflict-related violence faced by Congolese civilians. Maximum variation sampling was employed as a sample selection strategy, encompassing both interviews and document analysis. This provided the opportunity to gather various perspectives on how the study participants perceive the roles of MONUSCO peacekeepers and the Congolese National Police in civilian protection. Additionally, the design facilitated the exploration of how adopting a people-centered approach might contribute to the physical protection of civilians post-MONUSCO withdrawal.

The next section presents an overview of the primary data collection methods employed in this research, namely interviews combined with document analysis. It provides a practical explanation of the researcher's involvement in the data collection process, detailing each step to enhance transparency while gathering the primary and secondary data.

3.1 Primary Data Collection

The primary data for this research were collected through semi-structured individual interviews, conducted remotely in Eastern DRC between April and May 2024. These interviews were crucial for exploring and addressing the research questions and objectives (Clark et al., 2021, p. 426).

3.1.1 Sample Selection and Interview Participant Recruitment

In qualitative research, samples are a subset of individuals selected from a larger population deemed suitable as research participants (Clark et al., 2021, p.11). Samples were gathered using maximum variation sampling, a form of purposeful sampling strategy that ensures diversity in data (Clark et al., 2021).

The maximum variation sampling method enables the selection of participants based on various characteristics and diverse experiences, hence why it was employed (Clark et al., 2021 p.379). Additionally, compared to other data collection methods, the maximum variation sampling ensures diversity and representativeness of participants and their perspectives in the data collected during qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2013). Therefore, interview participants were identified based on their relevance to the research objectives and questions. Additionally, sample selection efforts were purposefully targeted at data sources that could provide rich descriptions of their viewpoints and experiences regarding the protection of civilians and a people-centered approach in Eastern DRC (Benoot et al., 2016).

To begin implementing the maximum variation sampling method, participants were divided into 3 key groups namely: MONUSCO representatives, Congolese national police officers, and civilians. A list of individuals and documents was compiled for each of the identified groups (Justify the sampling frame).

From these lists, a total of 11 Congolese civilians, 4 Congolese National Police officers, and 1 MONUSCO official were purposefully selected to participate in interviews.

The sample selection was based on the following selection criteria: participants must be between the ages of 18 -65, participants must reside in an Eastern DRC province, and

participants must have had at least 1 experience with conflict or peacekeepers.

Table 1: Composition of Individual Interview Participants

Group	Male	Female	Total
Civilian	7	4	11
Police Representative	3	1	4
MONUSCO Personnel	1	0	1
Total	11	5	16

Thereafter, the study participants were invited to join the study through social media communication, e-mail, and word-of-mouth, in partnership with a research assistant based in Eastern DR Congo.

3.1.2 Interview Procedure

As described by Clark et al. (2021), semi-structured interviews provide flexibility and facilitate rich descriptions, enabling participants to reflect on the events leading up to or following an event using an interview guide.

Therefore, a total of 15 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom. Although in-person interviews would have prevented some connectivity issues, conducting remote interviews provided flexibility to collect data less expensively, and enabled data collection with fewer safety concerns associated with in-person interactions (Clark et al., 2021, p. 440).

The interviews were conducted in both English and French, co-facilitated by an experienced interpreter based in Eastern DRC. Before the recordings began, informed consent was obtained from each participant (see section 3.7 below). To ensure privacy and continuous anonymity. Each participant's cameras were turned off upon their arrival in the Zoom waiting room before digitally recording the interview.

The interview sessions lasted for an hour each and utilized open-ended sets of questions formulated beforehand and used as an interview guide. Therefore, discussions were centered on the participant's conflict experiences, who protects during conflicts, the importance of trust and relationships for effective civilian protection, and perceptions regarding MONUSCO and the Congolese police physical protection roles. The semi-structured format facilitated in-depth information gathering by allowing further discussion and follow-up questions during the interviews (Clark et al., 2021 p.426).

This provided the opportunity to capture rich information on the protection of civilians following peacekeeping withdrawal in Eastern DRC.

The researcher collaborated with a research assistant born and raised in Eastern DRC also to facilitate access. He utilized familiarity with MONUSCO's base, its officials, and the local community to facilitate the remote data collection process. The assistant fostered communication by establishing personal rapport with selected individuals considered relevant for providing information in the study. For instance, the research assistant knew someone who had previously worked with MONUSCO and was interviewed. Through these collaborative efforts, referrals were obtained for connecting with more colleagues within MONUSCO, enabling the collection of data for the research.

Similarly, Congolese national police officers were recruited by reaching out to police departments in conflict-affected regions of eastern DR Congo. Officers with diverse backgrounds, including varying lengths of service, ranks, and specialized units, were invited to participate to capture varying perspectives within the Congolese police force.

Eligible participants were those with direct experiences related to the conflict or interactions with MONUSCO or local security personnel. This included people who had been displaced, witnessed violence, or collaborated with peacekeepers. By employing this approach, in-depth information was gathered, and the results will be discussed further.

3.1.3 Data Storage, Organization, and Retrieval

This section explains how the data collected for this research was stored, organized, and accessed for analysis.

According to Braun and Clarke (2013), following the collection of data, it is essential to begin the analysis process by ensuring that the data is adequately prepared. This process, as described by Berg and Lune (2012), follows a systematic approach to ensure effective management and accessibility of the collected data. Therefore, the study followed the three suggested steps described by Berg and Lune (2012 p.55): “data reduction, data display, and data conclusion and verification.”

Following the completion of the digital individual interviews, primarily conducted in French and English with 11 Congolese civilians, 4 police representatives, and 1 MONUSCO personnel, the audio recordings were securely stored on a password-protected digital drive—Google Drive (Causer et al., 2012). In this study, data reduction involved converting and transcribing the data into English texts using Microsoft Word, with assistance from an interpreter fluent in both French and English. This process was undertaken due to the potential complexity and volume of raw qualitative data, as emphasized by Braun and Clarke (2013, p.161) and Berg and Lune (2012, p.55).

Furthermore, to enhance data display in this study, a digital document storage folder (Google Drive) was utilized to aid in the organization and accessibility of the dataset's various components. (Berg & Lune, 2012 p.56). The transcribed interview documents were organized into folders divided and named according to the three key participant groups in the study. This was beneficial in capturing and easily recognizing the components of the dataset (Clark et al., 2021, p. 441).

Conclusions were derived from emerging themes identified in the data, which were then verified through a reliability check. This verification process entailed presenting the research as a meticulously documented procedure, accessible to other researchers, to ensure the potential replication of findings as stated by Berg and Lune (2012 p.56). The entire process unfolded iteratively, with adaptations made to choices, methods, and approaches following the researcher's reflections (Berg & Lune, 2012).

3.1.4 Thematic Analysis

To analyze collected data, the Reflexive Thematic Analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed in this research. This qualitative data analysis method can be used to develop, analyze, and interpret patterns in qualitative data sets while reflecting on the role of the researcher and the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In qualitative research, reflecting on the choices and decisions made during knowledge creation has become increasingly important (Ide & Beddoe, 2023). Therefore, the reflexive thematic analysis, as elucidated by Naeem et al. (2023), “enhances the depth of analysis and strengthens the trustworthiness and transparency of new insights unveiled in the study”.

The decision to utilize thematic analysis was carefully considered and aligned with this study's objectives, questions, and descriptive design. This method was deemed appropriate due to its suitability for deriving themes from the dataset. It directly addressed the study's objectives and questions and contributed to gaining fresh insights, as Maguire and Delahunt (2017) noted.

In this study, data analysis was conducted manually. Although proven useful by researchers such as Basit (2003), the decision not to utilize computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo and QDA Miner was made considering the limited time available for getting acquainted with a new software package, and the relatively small size of the dataset employed in this study (Clark et al., 2021 p.548).

The first step entailed reading through the transcribed interviews repeatedly until the main points and content of the discussions were fully understood. To begin this process, notes were made, and interesting points were jotted down in a research journal by the researcher (Naeem et al., 2023). Afterward, short phrases representing codes were assigned to significant segments of the interview transcripts, which had been previously highlighted with colors to capture the core message of the data (Naeem et al., 2023). Only the passages of the transcripts that were useful for answering the research question were coded. Each transcript was coded separately, and similar codes were grouped using sticky notes based on similar words or ideas.

After completing the initial coding stage, the codes were organized into four groups based on their similarity. This process aimed to identify relationships and patterns within the data, facilitating the development of meaningful themes. During the analysis of the data, codes that

represented similar ideas or concepts were grouped to ensure that interpretations across the entire dataset were consistent. These grouped codes were then used to identify five main themes that emerged from the data.

The process of selecting these themes was guided by the criteria for theme selection, which were established by Maguire and Delahunt (2017). Accurate theme descriptions were essential for maintaining transparency and facilitating the reproducibility of future studies in this area, given the limited exploration of civilian protection research in Eastern DRC.

In the next step, the themes developed were modified and defined incorporating feedback from peers. Some initial themes were substantial enough to capture the data, while others required developing sub-themes. The themes were not merely summaries of coded content but provided analytical insights and interpretations of the data, enriching the overall understanding of the research findings. Therefore, themes were then defined and interpreted based on the content of the data. Short sentences were provided to describe each theme, and these descriptions were supported by evidence from the data that reflects the themes identified.

Throughout the research process, a reflective journal was maintained from November 2023 to June 2024. This journal served as a comprehensive record, documenting the research decisions, as well as any modifications or adjustments made at each stage, from the initial development of the research proposal to the conclusion of the study (Ortlipp, 2015).

3.2 Secondary Data Collection

In this study, secondary data was obtained through desk-based research conducted for the literature review. Additionally, official UN policy documents were analyzed using document analysis to grasp the perspectives conveyed within them. This approach served to complement the insights gathered from the MONUSCO representative interviewed between May 2024 and June 2024.

3.2.1 Sources of Secondary Data

The secondary data for this research was sourced from relevant literature and documents identified using keywords such as “protection of civilians,” “peacekeeping,” “military protection of civilians,” “civilian engagement in protection,” and similar terms (Xiao & Watson, 2017). Therefore, studies unrelated to peacekeeping, conflicts, conflict contexts, and civilian protection were excluded.

The selection of documents aligning with the research questions was guided by criteria outlined by Dalglish et al. (2020, p.1426). This encompassed open-source articles from Google Scholar, official UN documents, newspaper articles, and other pertinent sources.

These documents provided more information on the role of MONUSCO peacekeepers in physically protecting civilians in Eastern DRC, as well as insights into the experiences and constraints faced by peacekeepers in the region. Additionally, these documents provided insights into the official perspectives of the UN and policymakers within the organization.

3.2.2 Document Sampling Selection

The documents used in this research were selected using the maximum variation sampling method, as detailed in section 3.3.2.

As stated by Braun and Clarke (2013 p.56), utilizing the maximum variation sampling method involves “purposefully selecting samples based on criteria that aid more insights into the study and address the research questions”.

This method was also employed for selecting documents.

Therefore, since the documents used in the study comprised textual materials, the criteria set for their selection differed from those set for interviews. Specifically, the criteria for selecting documents included: being open source, authored by the UN or other credible news sources, and should represent various official perspectives on the broader UN protection role. Out of the total 10 documents selected, 4 were ultimately used in the analysis.

Specifically, the documents used for this research were as follows:

- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2666 (2022), adopted by the Security Council at its 9226th meeting on 20 December 2022 (United Nations Security Council, 2022).
- United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Report of the Secretary-General (United Nations Security Council, 2021).
- Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (United Nations, 2015).
- A news article published by Al Jazeera titled “All UN peacekeepers to leave DR Congo by end of 2024” (Aljazeera, 2024b).

According to Morgan (2022), documents may serve as a substitute for gaining access to research participants who were difficult to reach. This approach also provides an opportunity to examine how texts portray the perspectives of individuals while minimizing potential harm to the researcher by eliminating the need to physically access sensitive study contexts (Morgan, 2022, p.65).

Recruiting MONUSCO representatives with diverse deployment experiences posed challenges due to strict protocols and the sensitive nature of the research topic. While it was feasible to interview one MONUSCO representative previously deployed in Eastern DRC, all other invitations extended to potential participants were declined.

Therefore, although documents cannot entirely substitute interviews for directly capturing perspectives from MONUSCO representatives, engaging with the policy documents provided a deeper understanding of the study as they reflect the tangible work and findings of others (Asdal & Reinertsen, 2021, pp. 2, 3). Additionally, access to these documents was facilitated by their open-source nature.

3.2.3 Document Organization and Analysis Procedure

The READ approach to document analysis, developed by Dalglish et al. (2020), was utilized in this study. The approach comprises four steps: "Ready your materials," "Extract data," "Analyze data," and "Distil findings." (Dalglish et al., 2020).

During this process, a file-naming system in the form of an Excel spreadsheet as recommended by Dalglish et al. (2020) was implemented to ensure coherence and extract details of each document, including the title, author name, year of publication, core discussions, and document link.

Furthermore, after carefully organizing the documents, they were thoroughly read iteratively (Dalglish et al., 2020). Relevant information was extracted using the Excel sheet highlighting feature, and important points were recorded in a notebook. Therefore, the data analysis process focused on gathering specific data related to the research questions, with an emphasis on enriching and building upon the pre-existing themes identified during the initial thematic analysis in Section 3.4.

The documents analyzed provided insight into the role of MONUSCO peacekeepers in physically provided civilians. Specifically, the analysis uncovered a notable lack of understanding, leading to false expectations among civilians regarding MONUSCO's rules of engagement on the ground. Interestingly, this understanding is well-established among Congolese police officers.

3.3 Validity, Reliability, and Study Credibility

In qualitative research practice, validity, reliability, and study credibility are commonly regarded as criteria for assessing the trustworthiness and quality of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p.278).

Validity in research pertains to “the degree to which a measure accurately reflects reality while taking into account the existence of many realities” (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p.280). Similarly, Noble and Smith (2015) describe validity as “the precision with which research findings accurately capture the data”.

In this research, Validity is supported by ensuring the triangulation of data sources and utilizing multiple methods of data collection (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Qualitative interviews were conducted to gather primary data, complemented by document analysis to corroborate and validate the perspectives obtained from interviews, thus enhancing the accuracy of the research findings. This approach, incorporating both the maximum variation sampling method and document analysis, strengthens the validity of the qualitative research.

Reliability refers to “the extent to which a qualitative study can be replicated when conducted by other researchers” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Although the quality of qualitative research cannot be solely determined by reliability due to multiple realities in the generation of knowledge, reliability is applicable if the trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis methods is demonstrated (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p.279).

This study therefore demonstrates reliability through gathering primary data directly from the country of study, ensuring that the findings are contextually relevant and accurate. Furthermore, the study procedure, from design to data analysis, was displayed to ensure that future researchers can replicate the steps and methods used, thereby enhancing the reliability of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 279; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 278).

The credibility of a qualitative study is crucial, given the concerns and debates surrounding methods decisions, as well as the accuracy and trustworthiness of research findings, in relation to the data gathered from research participants (Patton, 1999). Therefore, to enhance credibility, “input was sought from the research supervisor and fellow peers with experience and knowledge of qualitative research methods and data analysis.

3.4 Reflexivity

In qualitative research, maintaining researchers' reflexivity is paramount. Braun and Clarke (2022 p.5) emphasize the importance of researchers' reflexivity, which involves “critically reflecting on the researcher’s role, the choices made, and the reasons behind those choices in the research”.

My academic background in International Relations, coupled with personal experiences and connections with individuals from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), influenced my interest in understanding the conflict situation in the region. Additionally, coursework on post-conflict police and security reform, which I completed in Spring 2023, deepened my curiosity about the perceptions of the people toward the police.

Throughout the research journey, my discussions with close friends from Eastern DRC informed my assumption that civilians are significantly affected by the conflict. This, combined with my own experiences of violence and insecurity in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, shaped the development of my research topic. I aimed to provide a clearer picture of the experiences of people directly affected by the conflict.

Therefore, to address potential biases as highlighted in the study by Braun and Clarke (2013 p.36), I made a conscious effort to distance myself from the perspectives and experiences of the research participants and allowed them to speak for themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2022 p.18). This led me to choose a descriptive thematic analysis method, allowing the interviewees' perspectives to guide the research.

Additionally, although other study settings were possible, I selected Eastern DRC to understand the region's situation better, considering it to be one of the most affected areas. Qualitative research was chosen as it seemed realistic for capturing the lived experiences of the participants. I also wanted to be present in the interviewing process to ask questions that would yield in-depth information, and this influenced my methodological choices, including the adoption of semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

As the interviews progressed, I remained mindful of my initial assumptions and their potential influence on data analysis. I maintained reflexivity by regularly reflecting on my decisions and documenting them in a reflexive journal Braun and Clarke (2022 p.19), following guidance proposed by Ortlipp (2015). The journal served to record my evolving thoughts, decisions, and reflections from the study's inception to its conclusion (Anney, 2014).

3.5 Ethical Procedures

In this research, ethical considerations are paramount, especially given the sensitive nature of investigating the perspectives and experiences of civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). To address these concerns, oral consent was documented by recording the conversation where the consent was given, ensuring both parties understood and agreed to the terms discussed (Berg, 2001).

Participants were assured of their anonymity and informed that consent could be withdrawn at any time without giving a reason. It was made clear that participants' data would be deleted upon withdrawal of consent, and there would be no consequences for choosing to do so. Additionally, participants could access, correct, or delete personal data about themselves by submitting a request to the researcher in writing or orally.

The study was ethically approved by the Norwegian Shared Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT), ensuring compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). To further adhere to ethical guidelines, an introduction letter authorizing data collection by the researcher was obtained from the research institution (NMBU).

During interviews, measures were taken to ensure that the well-being of the participants was prioritized to minimize potential distress for the researcher and interviewees. For instance, to ensure a secure and anonymous interview environment, access to Zoom calls was restricted through the use of passwords, and the video feature was disabled. This measure helps maintain confidentiality and privacy by ensuring that only authorized participants can join the interviews.

Essentially, in this research, careful measures were taken to preserve the anonymity of participants, ensuring that the opinions shared do not solely represent the institutions they are affiliated with. Each perspective presented in the analysis stems from one-on-one interactions with participants, fostering a rapport conducive to capturing their unique perspectives and lived experiences.

3.6 Limitations

Accessing study participants posed a challenge due to the volatile conflict context in DR Congo. To address this, a research assistant well-versed in the conflict context, knowledgeable about gatekeepers, and fluent in local languages was recruited. The assistant was provided with the researcher's official school ID card, validating their identity and affiliation with the university. However, despite employing a maximum variation sampling method and document analysis, some voices and perspectives of civilian groups may not have been captured due to logistical constraints associated with remote research facilitation. This limitation particularly affected representation from certain groups, such as those residing in remote humanitarian camps. To address this limitation in future research, field-based research conducted over an extended duration is suggested.

Furthermore, the participation of some individuals in the interviews was limited by their reluctance to engage without financial compensation, which presented a challenge in this research. During the recruitment process, it became evident that certain participants had concerns about the potential financial expenses associated with participation in the study (Cupples & Kindon, 2014). This hesitancy was more prevalent among civilian participants. The researcher immediately understood this due to a prior understanding of the economic situation in the DRC where most of the population lives in extreme poverty, as outlined in the report (The World Bank, 2024). Therefore, to ethically address this concern and prioritize well-being as highlighted by Miteu (2024), participants were offered compensation to cover any expenses they might incur as a result of their participation in the study. Furthermore, in addition to clarifying that participation could be declined without repercussion, more clarification was provided to ensure that the incentives did not compromise the voluntary nature of participation or influence participants' responses during the interviews (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Lastly, a potential limitation was the language barrier in Eastern DRC. While MONUSCO officials participating in the research were fluent in English, the primary language used, many Congolese civilians preferred French for communication. To address this, interviews were co-facilitated by the research assistant, who is fluent in French. These measures were beneficial for obtaining in-depth information and data.

4.0 Congo's Historical Background

The Democratic Republic of Congo has a complex and multifaceted history that calls for a chronological examination of events. This study delves into the involvement of the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC categorized into three phases, each marked by crucial events essentially included for comprehending the context effectively.

The first phase highlights the origins of the DRC conflict, marked by the arrival of ONUC in the 1960s following the nation's independence from Belgian colonial rule. The second phase involves the transition from ONUC to MONUSC in the 1990s, triggered by the Rwandan genocide, which intensified efforts toward civilian protection with more robust approaches.

The third phase encompasses the transition from MONUC to MONUSCO in 2010, partly due to perceptions of ineffective protection despite adopting robust strategies (Stoney, 2023).

This historical background will be carefully explored to shed light on the ongoing conflict situation in the DRC and its impact on civilian protection, which will be applicable in the discussion of the findings section.

4.1 Overview of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is renowned for its abundant natural resources, such as cobalt, coltan, diamonds, and timber, making it one of the world's richest repositories. Yet, despite its wealth, the nation has been plagued by recurring conflicts, resulting in dire consequences for its civilian population (Karbo & Mutisi, 2011).

The origins of conflicts in the DRC date back to the post-independence period in the 1960s, marked by the withdrawal of the Belgian colony under King Leopold II. The Belgian colonialists ruled the Congo Free State with expansionist economic policies and ambitions. This resulted in utilizing the Congolese population for forced labor with the aim of wealth accumulation for a long period (Wanki, 2011). However, despite the lack of preparation by the Belgian colonialists for independence, their colonial ideas were short-lived.

This was due to a remarkable speech by Patrice Lumumba, a Congolese independence leader and the first democratically elected Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, who advocated for Congo's independence from Belgian colonial rule (United Nations, 2019). Therefore, the Democratic Republic of Congo underwent several name changes shortly after gaining independence, reflecting the nation's evolving political landscape (McCloskey, 2010).

4.1.1 The Arrival of ONUC in the DRC

On June 30, 1960, the United Nations Security Council established the first UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, commonly referred to in French as “Opération des Nations Unies au Congo, or ONUC” (ONUC, 2001).

Following the independence of the Democratic Republic of Congo from Belgium in 1960, foreign military assistance was requested by the Congolese government under the administration of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. This was due to political tensions and aggression directed at the nation from internal sources (The Brussels Times, 2018). Despite the end of colonial rule, Belgium maintained close ties with Congo, offering technical and military support. However, with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 143, Belgian forces were required to withdraw to facilitate the deployment and support of ONUC. This withdrawal aimed to create a conducive environment for the Congolese security forces to eventually defend their nation independently (Security Council Resolution 143 - UNSCR, 1960).

Scholarly accounts highlight that ONUC's initial deployment in the DRC aimed to safeguard the nation's territorial integrity and oversee the withdrawal of Belgian forces (Adolphe, 2023). According to Aksu (2003), initially, ONUC's mandate prioritized maintaining law and order without direct intervention in the DRC's internal affairs. However, the assassination of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in 1961 and escalating political complexities prompted an expansion of ONUC's role. More particularly, the power struggle in Katanga province necessitated a broader operation, empowering ONUC to use force when needed to prevent civil war (Dorn, 2013).

Therefore, ONUC expanded its peacekeeping force by approximately 20,000 officers, including a civilian component, in pursuit of this objective until 1994 when the mission was concluded.

This study suggests that ONUC's primary objective was not initially focused on providing physical protection to civilians in the DRC, as demonstrated by the outlined events. Hence, the next section will examine the evolving role of the UN peacekeeping missions, spanning MONUC, and MONUSCO. This analysis aims to assess how their involvement has evolved and to evaluate the effectiveness of their roles in civilian protection.

4.1.2 The Rwanda Genocide of 1994

Following the conclusion of ONUC in 1964, the Democratic Republic of Congo witnessed a period marked by instability and violent conflicts (Novosseloff et al., 2019).

The Rwanda genocide marked an unforgettable event in the context of the DRC conflict. From April to June 1994, ethnic tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis escalated, leading to widespread violence and mass killings of Rwandans (BBC News, 2011a). Therefore, the aftermath of the Rwanda genocide targeted against the Tutsi by the Hutus in 1994 led to a significant exodus of Hutus fleeing to the Eastern DRC provinces (MONUSCO, 2021). According to research conducted by Venugopalan (2016), the mass immigration of Hutus to the Eastern DRC, including militiamen responsible for the genocide, had significant implications for the country.

Although the genocide in Rwanda ended and stabilization was restored due to the victory of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), violence never ceased in the DRC (Berwouts, 2017 p.15). The Rwandan army, having fled to Eastern Congo, became well settled, providing Rwanda and Uganda with an opportunity to support rebel factions, including the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), to overthrow Kabila's regime in August 1998. This resulted in the outbreak of the Second Congo War and increased tensions among parties to the conflict (Turner, 2007).

4.1.3 The First and Second Congo Wars

Following the Rwandan genocide in 1994, the First Congo War erupted in 1996. This war was instigated by Rwanda, with support from Uganda, to eradicate genocide perpetrators who had sought refuge in the Eastern DRC from Rwanda (Eastern Congo Initiative, 2020). Additionally, this involved collaboration with the Congolese opposition leader Laurent Kabila, who successfully ousted the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko. Historical accounts indicate intense fighting during this period, resulting in the capture of cities in eastern DRC, including Bunia and Kisangani (Berwouts, 2017 p.17).

The war lasted until 1997, marking a new political regime following tensions, and a change of name from Zaire to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Williams, 2013). Despite this development, the transition to a new political regime and name change did not signify the end of conflict in the DRC context. Instead, it marked the beginning of a new phase of instability and violence.

Shortly after the First Congo War, the Second Congo War broke out, further intensifying tensions and perpetuating a cycle of conflict and instability in the region.

For International Relations scholars, the Second Congo War, which lasted from 1998 to 2003 saw shifts in alliances and support among these various actors (Herța, 2014). In addition, scholarly analysis described the era as intense and deadly. The worsening ties between former ally Rwanda and Congolese President Laurent-Désiré Kabila served as the basis of the onset of the severe Second Congo War in 1998 (Tamm, 2019).

Kabila declared himself president and renamed the country from Zaire to the Democratic Republic of Congo (McCloskey, 2010). However, Kabila's regime encountered numerous challenges, including regional tensions and ethnic conflicts. Therefore, the tensions reached a breaking point when Kabila called for the withdrawal of Rwandan forces from the DRC. Rwanda violently retaliated to this action, starting a conflict that had a significant impact on both the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the continent of Africa as a whole.

The Congo War was fuelled by the competition for control over natural resources, making it a conflict with broader regional implications. This external involvement transformed the war into an African affair, prompting intervention by the United Nations Security Council.

The Council exerted pressure on the warring parties to reach a ceasefire in the DRC, culminating in the official end of the war in 2003 through the Lusaka ceasefire agreement (Khan, 2012). However, civilians bore the brunt of the conflict, becoming collateral damage in a war characterized by the presence of foreign armies (Berwouts, 2017 p.21).

This study emphasizes that the two Congo wars and the Rwanda genocide are significant events that cannot be overlooked in discussions about the conflict in the DRC. They provide the context for understanding the recurring cycles of violence in the country. Recognizing their significance lays the groundwork for examining the role of the UN peacekeeping mission, which evolved from ONUC to MONUC in 1999, as discussed in the following section.

4.1.4 The Deployment of MONUC

In August 1999, in response to the call of the UN Security Council, Zambia initiated the July 10 Lusaka ceasefire agreement, aimed at ending the Second Congo War and the violence exchanged among the warring parties, including the DRC, Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe (Barrera, 2014).

According to Berwouts (2017), the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, also known by its French acronym “Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo (MONUC) was deployed to replace the foreign troops already present in the country and observe the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. In addition to its primary role, MONUC was tasked with monitoring human rights violations in collaboration with non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, it oversaw matters related to the release of prisoners of war and military captives (Khan, 2012).

As of June 2010, MONUC comprised a total of 20,586 uniformed personnel, including 18,653 troops, 704 military observers, and 1,229 police officers, alongside a significant number of civilian staff and volunteers (MONUC, n.d.). Therefore, in the following years, the mission's role expanded to support the transition to a democratic government in the DRC, particularly during the general elections of 2006, where MONUC played a crucial and active role (Berwouts, 2017 p.47).

While discussions regarding the mission's role in protecting civilians during this period may appear limited, evidence from a Relief Web situation report sheds light on significant activities. These encompassed providing security and protection for civilians, offering political assistance during the transitional phase, disarming and reintegrating combatants into society, and conducting police force training, among other tasks for the election. As such, these objectives were pursued with the understanding that all necessary means, including the use of force, might be employed to achieve them (Relief Web, 2006). In essence, MONUC's mandate encompassed a comprehensive set of Security Council resolutions aimed at enhancing the mission's capabilities, expanding its troop numbers, and adopting a more robust stance on the protection of civilians (Ogunrotifa, 2012).

Notwithstanding these contributions, the UN's perceived failure to meet expectations regarding protection prompted the Congolese government to advocate for a reassessment or withdrawal of the mission to address the evolving challenges. (Novosseloff et al., 2019).

The DRC government's call for MONUC withdrawal stemmed from the perceived improvement in stability, doubts about the effectiveness of UN troops in protection roles, and the huge costs associated with hosting the international stabilization mission (Berwouts, 2017 p.49). Yet, the UN resisted withdrawal, citing the ongoing need for humanitarian assistance and support for internally displaced people affected by the security situation in the region (A. Boutellis & Lacaille, 2011).

In 2010, the transition from MONUC to MONUSCO occurred due to the challenges encountered by the UN mission in the eastern region of the DRC in effectively protecting civilians, as noted by Boutellis and Lacaille (2011).

4.1.5 Transition from MONUC to MONUSCO

The evolution of UN peacekeeping missions, along with their mandates and activities in the DRC, highlights the dynamic nature of the conflict context, particularly in the eastern region.

Kris Berwouts, in his book dedicated to detailing the events and the volatile conflict situation in the DRC, asserts that despite numerous endeavors including peace agreements, political negotiations, and international involvements, the conflicts in the DRC have remained incompletely resolved to date (Berwouts, 2017 p.2). It is crucial to note that this took a toll on the protection of civilians.

As previously mentioned, the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) transformed and was renamed the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in July 2010, following the adoption of the UNSC Resolution 1925 (MONUSCO, 2016).

Following its inception, MONUC initially adhered to a traditional peacekeeping framework, prioritizing monitoring and observation over the use of force, as noted by Spijkers (2015). However, with the establishment of MONUSCO, there was a notable transition towards a stabilization focus, accompanied by an increased emphasis on protecting civilians, as highlighted by Russo (2021).

This shift also entailed adopting a more militarized and robust approach to peacekeeping operations. To provide further insight, Security Council Resolution 1925, adopted in 2010, extended the mandate of MONUSCO until June 30, 2011, and authorized the establishment of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB). The FIB was deployed to the eastern region of the DRC to address the threats posed by armed groups, marking a significant development in the mission's operations (MONUC, 2016).

To explain further, the militarized peacekeeping approach of MONUSCO brought about prominent programs including the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants (DDR) and the deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB). Therefore, despite resources invested in military solutions, they have not been effective in consolidating peace because they fail to address drivers of conflict and have not been sufficiently connected to a broader political strategy.

5.0 Findings and Discussion

Following data analysis, four main themes emerged. This section offers a detailed discussion of each identified key theme, all directly linked to the research objectives which include:

Objective 1: To examine the security landscape for the physical protection of civilians prior to the withdrawal of the MONUSCO forces from Eastern DRC.

Objective 2: To examine the perspectives of civilians, MONUSCO personnel, and the Congolese National Police on how adopting a people-centered approach might enhance the physical protection of civilians by the Congolese National Police following MONUSCO's withdrawal from Eastern DRC.

Each objective will be addressed in light of the emerging themes from the research, focusing on exploring how the adoption of a people-centered approach by local security forces might enhance the physical protection of civilians in Eastern DRC following the withdrawal of the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission. The identified themes are as follows:

Theme 1: Civilians' Fear of Unpredictable Violence and Their Tendency to Seek Self-Protection by Bearing Arms.

Theme 2: Ineffectiveness of MONUSCO Protection Policies and Rules of Engagement in Meeting Protection Expectations

Theme 3: The strained relationship between the police and the civilians diminishes trust and confidence despite their shared concern for civilian protection.

Theme 4: Addressing protection gaps by prioritizing civilian voices and needs through relationship building.

5.1 The Security Landscape for Physical Protection and the Role of MONUSCO Peacekeepers in Eastern DRC

This section addresses the first research objective, which examines the security landscape for the physical protection of civilians prior to the withdrawal of MONUSCO forces from Eastern DRC.

Section 5.1.1 delves into the first research question, exploring how Congolese civilians experience and address conflict-related physical violence in Eastern DRC, with sub-themes, while Section 5.1.2 provides insights into the second research question, focusing on how Civilians, Congolese National police, and MONUSCO representatives perceive the role of MONUSCO peacekeepers in protecting civilians in Eastern DRC.

5.1.1 Experiences of Civilians in the Recurring Cycles of Conflict in Eastern DRC

Civilians in the Eastern DRC shared a common perspective on their experiences with conflict, emphasizing its cyclical nature. Participants consistently highlighted the recurring cycles of conflict in the region, which they viewed as a major and ongoing concern.

Civilian 1, originally from Kalehe, Eastern DRC, but compelled to relocate to Goma in 2004 due to escalating conflict in the region, provided firsthand insight into the recurrent nature of the conflict.

According to Civilian 1:

“The conflict initially started in 1994 when there was genocide in Rwanda, and then one tribe had to move to Congo just to escape the conflict in Rwanda. The refugees came from Rwanda for the first time. Then Zaire Mobutu, the President of Zaire at that time, refused to open the borders. As a result, the international community tried to impose some sanctions. Mobutu became afraid and was obliged to open the borders, and there was no control. The people from Rwanda were coming to Congo with arms and were creating trouble, and the indigenous people here tried to respond to that”.

Recounting his experience, Civilian 1 described a transition from peace to heightened armed conflicts spanning from 2006 to 2013:

“I lived in a complicated situation since arriving here in Goma. In 2004, there was peace, but from 2006 to 2007, the insecurity began. It was the time of the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) conflict. We heard the detonation of guns and bombs from SAKE, RUMANGABO, and RUNYONI—there were many. The same situation continued until 2013 with M23, and until now it has not been peaceful. People are being killed every morning and evening”.

This finding aligns with the mandate outlined in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2666, published, and renewed in December 2022, which points out the mission's commitment to protecting civilians amidst recurring cycles of conflicts. The mandate acknowledges the persistent threats posed by armed groups and the significant impact of such violence on the security of local populations, exposing them to further risks (UN Security Council, 2022).

“The DRC is still plagued by intercommunal and militia violence in some areas of the country, as well as recurrent and changing cycles of conflict and persistent violence by both foreign and domestic armed groups, all of which increase the country's security concerns, human rights, and humanitarian crises”.

Similarly, Civilian 9, a long-term resident of the highlands of Eastern DRC, provided valuable insights into the prolonged conflict in the region. Emphasizing the historical depth of the violence, she experienced conflicts for approximately 50 years which has also been passed down to generations.

“The conflicts in Congo didn't begin today; they began many years ago, around 50 years. And if you try to see, the new generation was born in the conflicts, grew up in conflict, and up to now, we are living the conflict”.

This represents that the presence of conflict not only breeds violence but is accompanied by negative experiences for the civilian population, and this can go on for years if conflict persists. The experiences of civilians in recurring cycles of conflict in Eastern DRC have profoundly influenced their narratives, depicting an integration into their daily lives. This will be further explored as a sub-theme in the next section.

5.1.1.1 The Integration of Conflict into Daily Civilian Life

This theme is evident not only among civilians but also among police officers, providing insight into the impacts of the conflicts on civilians, based on their lived experiences.

Civilians can face threats from a range of sources, including state, non-state, external, and local actors (Jose & Medie, 2015). In some parts of Eastern DRC, this threat is felt due to actions driven by the interests of rebel groups, as well as international and regional actors seeking to exploit the country's wealth and resources (Nichols, 2018). As a result, civilians navigate their daily lives with a constant awareness of the potential for conflict to erupt at any moment, emphasizing the challenges faced in conflict-prone contexts.

For instance, Civilian 4, a 40-year-old resident of Goma, recounted the escalating violence driven by conflict in his community. This heightened state of insecurity has reshaped the daily lives of residents, who live with the constant fear of conflicts coming closer to where they live. Civilian 4's response points out the widespread violence that influenced the civilians' freedom to go about their daily activities.

“In this community, we were living in peace from the time I was born until I reached the age of 18. We started experiencing conflict. It was in the year 2020 that the conflict escalated, and people started fighting in the markets. Since that time, civilians began to buy weapons and guns and were killing people indiscriminately. People could not go around as they could be killed. People are being killed during the day, and people are walking with guns and machetes in the city. Every day, we witness assassinations. I think people are carrying these weapons for their protection, but I also think they put other civilians in danger”.

These discussions are significant as they reveal that conflict has become deeply embedded in the daily lives of both civilians and police officers. Additionally, this indicates a level of acceptance of the situation, underscoring the long-term impact of conflict cycles in such contexts. The integration of conflict into daily routines highlights the need for sustainable solutions to address the underlying causes and promote lasting peace in the community.

Furthermore, the acceptance of conflict as a regular occurrence in the daily lives of police officers is noteworthy. According to Police Officer 1, who has been stationed in Bukavu since 2013, conflicts and attacks are commonplace in the community. This acknowledgment extends beyond the professional realm, reflecting a personal acceptance of the situation. However, the officer's comments also reveal underlying fears, particularly regarding the absence of peace and the potential for division among authorities involved in protecting civilians.

“We all experience conflicts and attacks in this community; it is nothing new for us. What I fear the most as a human being is the lack of peace”.

This can be linked to an existing study that points out that conflict is a natural component of human interaction and does not inherently imply negativity. However, when conflict escalates to violence or manifests as latent responses, it becomes destructive (Danish Refugee Council & Danish Demining Group, 2021).

Civilian 5 who is a human rights activist and has lived in Kinshasa since she was born offered a different perspective that contrasts the experiences of Civilian 4 and Police Officer 1, particularly regarding the prevalence of conflict in their respective regions. While Civilian 4 and Police Officer 1, located in the eastern region, acknowledged the integration of conflicts into their daily lives, Civilian 5, presents a different reality.

The participant's account of the situation in Kinshasa highlights that conflict is not uniformly experienced across the DRC. She describes her community in Kinshasa as free of violence with minimal exposure to conflict or rebel attacks. However, she also acknowledged that the need for protection arises when instances of gang violence, such as the activities of the Kuluna gangs, disrupt the peace in her community. This highlights the varying experiences of conflict across different regions of the DRC. While Civilian 5 may not directly experience conflict in her daily life, she is aware of its existence and the need for protection, particularly in the eastern DRC provinces where conflict is more present.

“It has been a very long time since I started living here. I grew up in Kinshasa, but I have never really experienced many conflicts in Kinshasa where I live. When there is conflict in the eastern region, the local population complains a lot because they don't see the role that

MONUSCO is playing. Women are complaining of being raped, children are killed. In Kinshasa, the greatest threat is from gangs. For example, with the Kuluna gangs, in the past, the police played a role in ensuring that the community was safe from the gangs”.

Despite residing in a relatively peaceful area, Civilian 5 recognizes the broader context of conflict in the DRC and emphasizes the critical need to protect civilians, especially in regions vulnerable to frequent attacks and violence. However, civilians also describe a pervasive fear of unpredictable violence as a common experience in the Eastern DRC security landscape.

5.1.1.2 The Fear of Unpredictable Violence

Fear in the DRC conflict context encompasses the civilians' feelings of worry and anxiety stemming from the widespread violence and conflicts in the Eastern region. This theme highlights how civilians perceive fear of conflicts occurring as inherent in their daily lives. In this context, fear is closely associated with worry, and manifests in various ways depending on the intensity of violence and the specific circumstances encountered during conflicts.

In eastern DRC, Residents of conflict-affected areas described their concern about the potential recurrence of hostilities and violence, particularly perpetrated by rebel groups. For instance, in a report by Sengenya (2023) published on *The New Humanitarian* platform, it was noted that residents in conflict-affected areas were bracing themselves for the potential escalation of violence. This heightened state of readiness stemmed from the fear of attacks by the M23 rebel group in Goma as of May 2023.

An unnamed human rights activist from Kiwanja expressed this fear, stating, *“We fear a resumption of hostility. The inhabitants no longer visit their fields”.*

Similarly, this experience was shared by Civilian 3, a resident of Goma for 21 years, who has witnessed clashes between the M23 rebels and government forces firsthand: she described the fear of unpredictable violence implying that safety could be compromised at any moment.

“What fears me the most is that you cannot sleep, thinking that you are safe. You go around with no hope that you will come back home safe because every evening you hear that a neighbor was shot at their place. This fears me so much because even if you are at your place, you go to the market, you are not safe”.

This description corresponds with the findings from Schon's study (2016), which highlighted how civilians' uncertainty about the occurrence of violence and conflict increases their fear. Furthermore, armed groups may deliberately exploit or permit this atmosphere of fear.

The fear experienced by civilians in Bukavu is rooted in a lifetime of conflict experiences. Civilian 7, who has lived in Bukavu since 1997 after fleeing her hometown, Itombwe due to conflict, shared her encounters. Working for a governmental institution, the civilian described being kidnapped, beaten and robbed multiple times while carrying out his duties. These incidents signify the constant fear of being targeted and the unpredictable nature of daily life in the community, where attacks can occur suddenly and without warning.

“I live in a region that has been insecure for many years. Since the War of 1996, I have been living in Itombwe. Due to the conflict, I moved from Itombwe to Kamituga until eventually settling in Bukavu. Despite my relocation, I continue to work in Itombwe.

Over the years, I have faced numerous challenges. In my role at SAEMAP, a governmental institution in the area, I have been kidnapped at least five times, beaten, and robbed of money. Additionally, the reports I submit to authorities have been confiscated. Moreover, people in this region face daily threats to their lives. Attacks occur suddenly, and people are killed without mercy. This disregard for human life deeply worries me”.

This points out the realities faced by Congolese civilians living in the conflict-sensitive regions of the country, emphasizing the significant impact of fear on the pursuit of protection. Civilian 3 further elaborated on her ordeal:

“What bothered me the most was the gunfire and the way it sounded. All the time, I could see people's blood everywhere as we ran from our villages. The sight of the dead bodies terrified me so much”.

Civilian 2, an unmarried civilian and lecturer who has resided in Goma for over 40 years, recounted experiencing the arrival of the rebel group Adel and the intervention of MONUSCO during the rebel violence in 1999. He shared a distinct perspective on fear in conflict. Despite being unmarried, the fear was pervasive, as death could choose anyone during conflicts:

“During the conflicts, death could choose no one. We had to pray for ourselves, we had to pray for our families. What worries me the most is that we are together with our

families, and when the war occurs, it is a pity because dying together with your family is not an easy thing.”

The experiences of fear among civilians in the Eastern DRC are not uniform; rather, they vary significantly from person to person. Civilians emphasized that the intensity of fear they feel can differ based on their circumstances and the factors surrounding them. Despite these variations, the central reality remains constant: civilians in the region live in constant fear due to the unpredictable nature of violence.

It is important to note that fear is not solely an individual experience. Many civilians not only feel fear for themselves but also worry about the safety of their families and loved ones. This extends the scope of fear beyond individual concerns to encompass broader familial and community anxieties.

Various factors influence the intensity of fear experienced by individuals. These include their acceptance of the conflict, the size of their family, and the presence of loved ones in their lives. Civilian 8, a professor with firsthand experience of violent conflict in Goma, shared his perspective:

“Not only have I been living with conflicts, but I have also been interested in researching conflict. I have more to complain about than to be satisfied. Cities fell into the hands of rebels when MONUSCO was there, and people died. I must add that I was not married at that time, and the fear was about me. Protection, for me, means guaranteeing to every citizen that they can go about their daily activities without worry and discrimination based on race, tribe, or origin. If these elements are missing, there will be insecurity”.

Interestingly, this fear and the accompanying need for protection are not exclusive to civilians, they also extend to the police force operating within these conflict-affected regions. This suggests a shared vulnerability and an acknowledgment of the threats that characterize life in these areas.

In summary, the fear experiences among civilians in the Eastern DRC are multifaceted and influenced by a range of personal and contextual factors. Recognizing these variations is crucial for understanding the complex dynamics of fear in conflict-affected regions and the reasons behind seeking self-protection which sometimes results in bearing arms among civilians.

5.1.1.3 Civilian Tendency to Address Conflict-Related Violence by Bearing Arms for Self-Protection

This thematic finding delves into the civilian experience in Eastern DRC, where the ongoing conflicts and violence have instilled an increased fear of unpredictable violence. As a result, civilians have increasingly turned to self-protection measures, including the bearing of arms, as a way of addressing the negative experiences of violence in conflict situations.

During the interview with Civilian 4, a 40-year-old man who experienced the conflict in Eastern DRC in 2010, he emphasized the prevalence of civilians seeking self-protection by bearing arms in the community:

“People are being killed during the day, and people are walking with guns and machetes in the city. Every day, we witness assassinations. I think people are carrying these weapons for their protection, but I also think they put other civilians in insecurity”.

This urgent response not only highlights the significant challenges faced by civilians in their communities due to the fear of unpredictable violence but also underscores their proactive approach to addressing their protection needs. It is evident that civilians do not seek protection without reason; however, there exists a delicate balance between utilizing arms for self-protection when necessary and the potential for these arms to increase insecurity for other civilians.

Buchanan and Widmer (2006) suggest in their study that the civilian bearing of arms, such as guns, can be influenced by the escalation of violence in conflict contexts. Similarly, in recent conflicts, local militias may become militarized or take up arms to defend their homeland, representing just one of the reasons for bearing arms in conflict contexts (Zhukov, 2016). The finding regarding civilian self-protection amidst the conflicts in Eastern DRC is enriched by the insights of Jose and Medie (2015). From the scholars' perspective, civilian self-protection involves proactive measures taken by individuals or groups to safeguard their physical integrity in the face of ongoing violence.

Despite harboring a sense of resignation toward the persistent conflict, participants highlighted that seeking protection is not merely a choice but an essential means of survival amid ongoing conflict. This is because, as reported by the research participants, peacekeeping missions and the Congolese national police are not always present in every context, compelling people to find their protection solutions.

For instance, Civilian 4, residing in Goma and reflecting on the aftermath of the Rwandan conflict of 1994, recalled how the influx of Tutsi refugees into Eastern DRC led to escalating tensions. With refugees arriving armed, conflicts erupted as local communities felt compelled to defend themselves.

When civilians encounter threats, whether from rebel groups or government forces, they seek protection from violence from these peacekeepers due to their presence in locations such as educational institutions, medical facilities, religious compounds, and United Nations bases (Fjelde et al., 2018). However, the participant highlighted instances where neither MONUSCO peacekeepers nor local security actors provided adequate protection, leaving civilians with no choice but to seek self-protection.

The cycle of conflict escalation was further linked to the M23 takeover of Bunia, forcing citizens to flee in search of safety which could not be gotten from security providers.

"The conflict initially started in 1994 when there was genocide in Rwanda. And then, one tribe had to move to Congo just to run from the conflict in Rwanda. That's where everything started because the refugees came from Rwanda with arms. Due to this, some Congolese groups were defending themselves against the refugees who came with arms and were creating trouble. Also, when the M23 took over Bunia, the citizens were obliged to run where they would find refuge. It's neither the MONUSCO camp nor the local police camp or the national army".

Furthermore, describing the situation, Civilian 3, a resident of Bukavu in Eastern DRC for 23 years, recounted her experience during a community attack. She mentioned fleeing to Bukavu from her previous residence as a response to the escalating conflict and highlighted the contributions of Wazalendo the religious sect in the region that helps to

protect civilians and provide a haven for civilians who seek self-protection from conflicts.

“You know, in my village, there is neither a police officer nor the army. When we are attacked, we run to hide from attacks to the armed group, which is called WAZALENDO nowadays. Wazalendo groups go and fight against the other armed groups for the sake of the people.

We lived in bad conditions. Today we are in the city and tomorrow in the forest due to attacks from rebels against the government army. We had to hide in the forest because if we hid near the city, the rebels would follow us. We walked for miles and the rebels did not hesitate to pursue us. If we heard them approaching from a distance, we always fled”.

Considering this reality, civilians are likely to seek self-protection measures in the presence of conflict or when there is an immediate need for it, as seen in the case of Eastern DRC. Therefore, from the perspective of civilians, while the motivation for seeking self-protection by bearing arms stems from the fear of unpredictable violence in the region, the integration of violence into their daily lives, and recurring conflicts, it is important to acknowledge that civilians bearing arms can also pose significant protection dangers.

5.1.2 Ineffectiveness of MONUSCO Protection Policies and Rules of Engagement in Meeting Protection Expectations (The Civilians' Perspectives)

Despite the presence of MONUSCO peacekeeping forces in Eastern DRC, interviews conducted with 10 out of 11 civilians revealed an expression of frustration. This is due to the perceived ineffectiveness of MONUSCO’s protection policies and rules of engagement to meet protection expectations in the face of rebel attacks.

Despite the presence of MONUSCO forces, civilians have expressed concerns about the peacekeepers' failure to intervene on the frontlines. They described instances where, despite having the necessary capacity and equipment to respond to rebel groups, the peacekeepers did not act. This finding aligns with Berwouts (2017), who noted that although MONUSCO increased its robustness and deployed rapid and flexible air units like the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) to protect civilians, these efforts fell short of meeting the people's expectations.

Both observations highlight the peacekeepers' lack of action, even when they are well-equipped.

Civilian 1 expressed a combination of disappointment as he gave an account of MONUSCO's role in protecting civilians despite being stationed where the rebels are operating.

“When I see MONUSCO, I feel bad because even if they are in your quarters, rebels can come and the MONUSCO will not come to protect you”. Even if you are attacked near their station, they won't intervene. Additionally, Congolese soldiers avoid areas where MONUSCO is present. MONUSCO stays on one side, while the rebels remain close by.

Despite being a well-organized army equipped with all necessary equipment, including weapons and guns, they do not provide the level of protection that is needed”.

Initially, civilians perceived MONUSCO as a provider of protection, and their bases were regarded as places of refuge. Similarly, research by Fjelde et al. (2018) suggests that civilians tend to seek protection in locations such as educational institutions, medical facilities, religious compounds, and United Nations bases where peacekeepers are present when they encounter threats.

Civilian 11, born in conflict in eastern DRC and having witnessed several conflicts, described how civilians would seek protection in MONUSCO bases during conflicts. However, over time, there was a shift in perception, with people beginning to harbor doubts about the effectiveness of the peacekeeping mission in meeting their protection expectations.

“MONUSCO used to be a place of refuge. I recall in my village, during conflicts between the local Mai Mai militia and our government, the population would seek safety in MONUSCO camps. As a child, the first sentence I learned in French was "MONUSCO Donne-Moi un biscuit," which means "MONUSCO give me a biscuit" in English. There was a sense of friendship between MONUSCO and the people, but this relationship has faded.

Observing the history of MONUSCO reveals changing missions over time. Initially, MONUSCO served as an observation mission, but it has now transitioned into an operational one. The shifting mandates have left people unable to differentiate their roles. Sadly, this has resulted in revolting ideas from the population, and the people are chasing them away. Now, MONUSCO gives conditions before protecting us or before operating, and if the conditions are not met, they don't protect us...

A UN mission with a very large budget, with so many workers and so many materials, has not been able to protect the population all these years”.

Civilian 7 also shared her concern, emphasizing how MONUSCO's failure to engage in situations involving rebel attacks affects her trust in the peacekeeping mission. She recounted instances where she witnessed people being killed by rebel groups repeatedly yet received no response from the peacekeepers.

“I trust something else, not MONUSCO. People have been killed near the MONUSCO station since 1996. In BENI and nearby areas, people keep getting killed close to the MONUSCO station. I remember in 2011, a family member was killed there, and in 2012, rebels were waiting for me, but luckily, I didn't take that route. Another person was killed there in 2019 and MONUSCO did not intervene. Because of all these reasons, I will never trust that force. They are not peacekeepers”.

Meanwhile, insights gathered from the Congolese National Police officers and MONUSCO representatives provided a different perspective, contrasting with the viewpoints of civilians which will be discussed in the next section.

5.1.2.1 Factors Influencing MONUSCO’s Ineffective Military Engagement in Meeting Protection Expectations (Insights from Police and MONUSCO Representatives)

Although civilians expressed disappointment with MONUSCO’s failure to meet protection expectations, gaining the perspectives of police officers offered more insight.

In contrast, many police officers believed that MONUSCO’s inability to intervene was due to circumstances that did not always permit them to protect in all situations. As described by Police Officer 1 who has been stationed in Bukavu since 2013, conflicts and attacks are commonplace in the community:

“What I know about MONUSCO is that it has not been deployed primarily to protect civilians. MONUSCO is there to intervene in certain situations, but not all. Therefore, I understand the differences between the ideologies of MONUSCO and the police. The extent

of MONUSCO's intervention depends on the agreement made with the government. This limitation means that, in some cases, rebels may kill civilians without MONUSCO intervening due to the restrictions”.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Police Officer 3, who was deployed in Eastern DRC in 2023 and has experienced violent conflicts, there has been an increased need for protection among the civilian population, He holds a positive view of the role of MONUSCO in addressing these protection needs.

According to the description provided, MONUSCO's role is perceived as focused on protecting civilians. Officer 3 further emphasized that MONUSCO's presence has been beneficial in training the Congolese National Police on how to provide protection in situations where civilians face attacks or threats of conflict-related violence.

“I have been deployed here since last year, but I am a native of this region. I witnessed the conflict during the time of NKUNDA Laurent and MUTEBUTSI, even though I was young at the time. I saw people being killed, and others fleeing to hide from the attacks. MONUSCO came to protect and assist civilians. They provided valuable training on protecting civilians from various threats”.

This perspective not only offers a different viewpoint but also reflects a sense of understanding regarding the perceived ineffectiveness of the peacekeeping mission.

Similarly, in the reflections of a MONUSCO personnel who was deployed in three provinces of the Eastern DRC for five years, he held a different perspective. The MONUSCO representative described the desperation for peace among the civilians which resulted in questioning the presence and role of the peacekeeping forces in conflict-affected regions as follows:

“The civilians in this region are very desperate to get peace and stability. This is what they all want, nothing more. However, when these expectations are not met, and they see MONUSCO forces moving around, they begin to question their presence. Why are they here when we are still being killed, our people and our women are being raped, and our children are forcibly recruited into armed groups”.

He further described the situation, which reflects a misconception held by the civilians regarding the role and capabilities of the mission. In his opinion, the mistaken belief that the mission is responsible for direct military engagement and frontline actions during rebel attacks is affecting the perception of the mission's effectiveness among civilians, whereas, in

reality, these responsibilities lie with the DRC government and security forces.

“There have been false expectations from the population who believe that the mission can do the job for them. For instance, during rebel attacks, civilians often expect the mission to take immediate action and engage in the frontlines. However, it is important to clarify that this is not the mission's role. Rather, it falls upon the DRC army to confront and engage with armed groups threatening either the military or civilians. While the mission can provide support, it cannot substitute for the DRC security forces. Through various discussions with locals, I discovered that there is a big gap in their expectations of the mission's involvement and its actual capacity to intervene”.

According to Resolution 2666 (2022) of the MONUSCO mandate, adopted by the Security Council on December 20, 2022, Paragraph 24 outlines the mission's duties:

“The mission is authorized to conduct targeted offensive operations in the DRC to neutralize armed groups, using a highly effective Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) under the authority of the Force Commander. These operations aim to decrease the threat posed by armed groups to state authority and civilian security, creating opportunities for stabilization activities, either independently or in conjunction with Congolese security forces. MONUSCO is also instructed to participate in increased and effective joint operations with Congolese security forces, including joint planning and tactical coordination... (United Nations Security Council, 2022)”.

Additionally, according to the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), published in December 2021, it was highlighted that the peacekeeping mission has been making significant efforts to protect civilians and engage with local communities. The report details various initiatives, including joint responses with local communities, supporting the deployment of police officers by the Congolese government to MONUSCO bases, and deploying the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) to deter attacks from armed groups as follows:

“MONUSCO continued to strengthen the coordination of its protection efforts across provinces. In mid-November, the Government deployed, with MONUSCO support, 750 police officers across Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu Provinces. From September to November, MONUSCO responded to at least 88 clearance requests for support from the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), including 66 for the

transport of members of the national defense and security forces on MONUSCO assets, 6 for support to military operations, and 16 for logistical support and supplies.

On 28 October, MONUSCO dispatched a standing combat deployment in response to renewed attacks by Mai-Mai coalitions around Bibokoboko in order to deter armed groups, support FARDC, and facilitate the return of displaced persons.

The MONUSCO force helped FARDC to repel attacks by CODECO in Ituri Province, to conduct offensive operations against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a rebel group from Uganda operating in DR Congo, and other armed groups, to protect civilians from retaliatory attacks and to prevent ADF movement towards Butembo, in North Kivu Province” (United Nations Security Council, 2021).

However, while MONUSCO supports these operations, the document did not suggest that MONUSCO peacekeepers or the FIB mostly independently engage in direct combat with armed groups. Instead, they often work jointly and provide support to the Congolese army and other local security forces (United Nations Security Council, 2021). This resonates with the points made in the study conducted by P. D. Williams (2023), indicating that although UN peacekeepers possess the authority to employ force in response to violence, the principle of impartiality within the UN can present a constraint. However, according to the study by Cammaert (2008), impartiality should not serve as a complete barrier preventing UN peacekeepers from protecting civilians.

Drawing on the 2015 HIPPO report, it is “emphasized that unarmed strategies should be the first resort for peacekeeping missions, although they are authorized to use any means necessary to protect civilians under imminent threat” (United Nations, 2015). The report highlights that the mere presence of a peacekeeping mission can contribute to civilian protection. However, the UN must take active measures when civilians are threatened.

“In prioritizing the protection of civilians, UN efforts must emphasize unarmed strategies regardless of the origin of threats. However, expectations have increased, particularly concerning the capability of UN missions to ensure civilian protection in various contexts. While some missions have demonstrated conviction in thwarting or mitigating threats, others have not succeeded in exhibiting the requisite resolve and action to protect civilians effectively (United Nations, 2015)”.

Therefore, although this document was published in 2015, it provides a glimpse of the impartial stance, expectation realities, and capabilities that potentially hinder peacekeepers from

engaging directly with combatants on the frontline. This influences their ability to eliminate the enemy, a role frequently anticipated by civilian populations.

5.1.2.2 Congolese Civilian Expectations and MONUSCO's Military Engagement Realities

In a news article published by Al Jazeera, an independent Arab media channel known for providing credible news and diverse perspectives on global politics while prioritizing people-centric reporting, the additional perspectives of civilians in Eastern DRC are portrayed (Aljazeera, 2024a). Interviews conducted by Amnesty International shed light on the civilians' perspectives which convey the typical nature of civilians to expect MONUSCO's involvement and intervention in situations involving threats to protection, especially when the government is unable to provide protection and the peacekeeping mission is present.

An interviewee from the human rights organization expressed his perspective:

“People expect that if their government fails to protect them, at the very least, the UN will intervene. However, over the years, the UN has been unable to prevent attacks or respond to them adequately. As a result, citizens feel that the UN is ineffective. MONUSCO has had an offensive mandate for 10 years now... People are angry and are demanding that if the mission cannot protect us, then it should leave” (Al Jazeera, 2023).

The tendency of civilians to expect intervention from the peacekeeping mission was further elaborated upon by the MONUSCO representative, who provided additional context indicating that this role is well understood by the Congolese security forces:

“When to engage must be jointly coordinated with the armed forces. I must emphasize this point. Every operation requires coordination with the Congolese military; we cannot do it alone.

Although MONUSCO has made efforts to sensitize the population and civilians about their role, it is very reasonable for someone who is crying for help to seek assistance from whoever can help. I can understand the confusion about the role from the civilian perspective, but the security forces are fully aware of MONUSCO's role through ongoing discussions and training sessions.”

In conclusion, the disparities in perceptions among civilians, police officers, MONUSCO representatives, and MONUSCO official policy documents reveal varying understandings of MONUSCO's role, its Protection Policies, and Rules of Engagement.

The civilians perceive MONUSCO's protection policies and rules of engagement as ineffective, attributing this to the mission's failure to meet their expectations and intervene effectively on conflict frontlines. On the other hand, police officers suggest that civilian misconceptions about MONUSCO's role contribute to perceived ineffectiveness. They believe that civilians overestimate the mission's role in direct military engagement and frontline actions during attacks.

Furthermore, from MONUSCO representatives' viewpoint, there is recognition of civilians' desperation for peace, yet a clear misunderstanding persists regarding the mission's capabilities. However, while MONUSCO's policy documents acknowledge its capacity for targeted offensive operations through the Force Intervention Brigade, they emphasize that these actions complement rather than replace the role of DRC security forces.

The observations contradict the positive peace theory, which promotes a peaceful security landscape by fostering community engagement and dialogue with civilians, as depicted in the literature by Hansen (2016). Hansen highlights the complex interplay between civilians and the mission, emphasizing the need for improved relationships with civilians to bridge understanding and effectively address protection needs following MONUSCO's eventual withdrawal from the Eastern DRC regions. This reflects that community engagement and mutual trust are not only essential for achieving sustainable peace and security but also instrumental in establishing closer connections with civilians. This approach helps identify and understand the reasons behind false expectations and differing perspectives on the role and effectiveness of civilian protection providers.

5.2 People-Centered Approach to Civilian Protection by the Congolese National Police

This section addresses the second research objective, which examines the perspectives of civilians, MONUSCO personnel, and the Congolese National Police on how adopting a people-centered approach might enhance the physical protection of civilians by the Congolese National Police following MONUSCO's withdrawal from Eastern DRC.

Section 5.2.1 delves into the third research question, exploring how Congolese Civilians, MONUSCO's representatives, and Congolese National Police perceive the role of the police in protecting civilians in Eastern DRC, with sub-themes. Additionally, Section 5.2.2 examines the fourth research question, focusing on how adopting a people-centered approach might contribute to the physical protection of civilians by the Police after MONUSCO's withdrawal from Eastern DRC.

5.2.1 Trust and Confidence in the Congolese National Police's Ability to Protect Civilians

The finding indicates that Congolese civilians and the National Police share concerns about civilian protection and recognize the challenges in the conflict-affected region. Many civilians who share a positive relationship with the police expressed confidence in the police's ability to protect civilians when MONUSCO withdraws from Eastern DRC, citing their shared understanding as crucial for effective protection. However, some civilians who have had negative experiences with the police, noted that this affects their relationship with the police, which is essential for building trust and confidence in the police to assume the protection role after MONUSCO's departure.

Civilian 9, a long-term resident of the highlands of Eastern DRC with firsthand experience of tribal conflict between the Banyamulenge tribe and the Banyindu, Bafuliru, Babembe, and Bamushi tribes, shared her perspective. She indicated that he has a positive relationship with the police and is confident in their ability to provide effective protection.

“I believe in the national police's ability to protect us because they are Congolese like me. They live here and have their families among us, and because of this, they can

sacrifice themselves to protect the civilians. I know that the police understand the challenges and dangers we face quite well. We all experience the same challenges and undergo the same dangers here. Personally, I don't want to live with MONUSCO anymore because I know that in the DRC, we have a government and an army capable of protecting civilians from any attack, along with the police. When I see our Congolese police, I feel happy and rejoice because they are like brothers, maybe even relatives, and they can protect us as fellow Congolese”.

Similarly, Civilian 1, originally from Kalehe, Eastern DRC, but compelled to relocate to Goma in 2004 due to escalating conflict in the region also shared his perspective:

“I think police and militaries can protect me better because they love their country, unlike MONUSCO, which we thought came to protect us, but this is not the case. MONUSCO seems to have come for their interests, but the police and our soldiers can do it better because it is their country, and their duty to protect us. The police understand the needs, challenges, and dangers faced by civilians.

Police Officer 2, who has been deployed in Beeni for three years, further elaborated on his opinion. He described the relationship between the police and civilians in terms of bond, which also influences his perception of the trust and confidence in the police's ability to protect civilians after MONUSCO withdraws.

“We have been trained by the same MONUSCO to protect civilians. If they leave, we will continue to protect civilians, and we will do it correctly because we love our country and our people.

We are like a family. Parents know their children; they understand where the challenges lie. Don't think that someone else can protect your family better than you. We will protect civilians even more effectively than MONUSCO did”.

The description of Police Officer 3, deployed to South Kivu in 2023 and with firsthand experience in violent conflicts, is also similar.

“We consider ourselves like a family, attentive to civilian needs much like parents are to their children. We believe trust in keeping your family safe starts with you. Our commitment is firm—we are dedicated to protecting civilians even better than MONUSCO. We are here for civilians, and ready to help with any issues they face.

However, despite this positive portrayal of a sense of understanding shared with civilians, the police officer went ahead to shed more light on the importance of positive police-civilian relationships. She perceived that these experiences influence civilian trust and confidence in the police's ability to provide effective physical protection from violence.

“Strengthening the relationship between police and civilians is crucial. We understand civilians want peace and protection. Without civilian trust, our ability to serve and protect is weakened.

Currently, civilian trust in the police is declining. Some in police uniforms have harmed civilians, leading to a loss of confidence in the police for protection.”

The descriptions highlight how despite differing views on the police-civilian relationship and its impact on the trust and confidence in the police, participants share a common concern for civilian protection.

Additionally, Quenza (2023) illustrated, that a people-centered approach entails a “humanistic approach”, which involves putting oneself in another person's shoes to tailor responses to the needs of individuals. Therefore, it can be understood from the police officers' accounts that there is an indication of people-centeredness among the local security forces in Eastern DRC. This is drawn from how the police officers expressed their confidence in assuming the protection of civilian role after MONUSCO leaves Eastern DRC.

5.2.1.1 Strained Relationship Between the Police and the Civilians Diminishes Trust and Confidence Despite Their Shared Concern for Civilian Protection.

Contrary to the positive viewpoints portrayed above, the descriptions provided by 5 civilians shed light on the strained relationship between the police and Congolese civilians, highlighting the factors that contribute to this situation.

Civilian 5, a human rights activist who has lived in Kinshasa since birth, shared her perspective. She emphasized feeling unsafe due to the activities of the police and questioned the ability of the police to protect her, despite living in a military camp:

“Personally, when I see the police, I don’t feel safe because sometimes the police and gangs work together to extort money from people. The police are corrupt, and there is no relationship between them and the population because of this. Now, I live in a military camp, and I don’t know how the police can protect me. However, I would like to see a police force that can genuinely keep people safe”.

Furthermore, civilian 6, who relocated to Goma for university studies, described the fear instilled by the Congolese National Police and soldiers. He contrasted the professionalism of police forces in other African countries with the intimidating behavior of the Congolese police, which points out a negative experience:

“The police and our soldiers instill fear. If you see a police officer at night, the first thought that comes to mind is one of threat. There is a saying that when a police officer asks for your ID card at night, it is not really about the ID card – they want your phone or belongings. They intimidate you and take everything you have.

I have traveled across some countries in Eastern Africa, and I see that their police are professional. If you ever feel threatened, meeting their police is like finding salvation! They are reliable. However, if you encounter the Congolese police at night, it is better to meet a lion”.

This perspective was also supported by Civilian 10, a female resident of Mwenga in South Kivu, who highlighted the relationship between the police and civilians in her account:

“The police are not professional enough to take over. We are afraid of MONUSCO’s departure... There is no good rapport, and if you meet the police at night, it is a matter of life and death because they treat people badly.”

Meanwhile, Civilian 3, a long-term resident of Bukavu, highlighted the disconnect between the police's role in protecting civilians and their behavior which is influencing civilian distrust and strained relationship with the police.

“The police understand the needs and challenges of civilians because they are close to us... We are aware that the primary role of the police and the army is to protect civilians even if they behave contrary... Do you know why civilians dislike the police? It is because of their behavior, and their ill-treatment towards the civilians they are supposed to protect. You can imagine the police or the soldier giving guns and other weapons to bandits so that they rob people.”

The experiences described indicate that various factors contribute to the perception of a strained relationship between civilians and the police in the DRC. As a result, the Congolese civilians highlighted that this often leads to violent outbursts from the population.

Civilian 6 mentioned instances where civilians have retaliated against the police, further contributing to the violence in the already conflict-ridden context of the DRC:

“You know, sometimes there are people also who cannot accept the threats from the police. Some people react, and the police are sometimes killed suddenly by the people”. This aligns with Robinson et al. (2023) study, which characterizes “retaliation as a negative reaction to a traumatic incident”.

The actions taken by civilians were further elaborated upon by Police Officer 4, who was deployed in South Kivu. He described how achieving peace and reducing violence are crucial in the DRC. However, he noted that while civilians have negative experiences, police officers also face challenges with civilians. These challenges may contribute to the perception of a strained relationship and overall ineffectiveness in their role. In his depiction:

“It is said that peace is a matter for everyone, and everyone must seek peace. The police cannot be everywhere and therefore may not always know exactly what is happening. As a result, insecurity can partly be attributed to civilians, who may contribute to it somehow”.

Police Officer 3, deployed in Bukavu Eastern DRC in 2023 and experienced in violent conflicts, provided an example of civilians contributing to violence and how this impacts the police's perception of civilians and vice-versa. According to her, civilians not only pose a danger themselves but also harbor and protect others who engage in violent behavior. This close-knit relationship among civilians complicates the police's ability to protect and prevent attacks from armed groups effectively.

“Our priority as police is to understand and address the needs of our civilians. This principle is ingrained in our police regulations. Even in the absence of MONUSCO, the police will continue to protect civilians. For instance, when the MONUSCO base in KAMANYOLA closed, it was handed over to the police...”

However, the trust between civilians and the police, which was once good, has diminished. This decline stems from disorderliness on both sides. For example, when a robber is apprehended in a community, it is not uncommon for fellow civilians to intervene and secure the robber's release. Afterward, the released robber may continue to pose a threat

to the same civilians who facilitated his release. Such occurrences impact civilian trust in the police”.

He further explained that the situation affects the police's ability to distinguish between civilians who pose a threat and those who are harmless:

“This country is ours; we must protect it. We must be united to combat the same enemy.... Nowadays, civilians don't trust the police. This is because some civilians wear our uniforms and attack their fellow civilians. Civilians will only understand that the people we assume protect us are the ones who attack us.”

Alternatively, police officer 4, who previously emphasized civilians' role in contributing to violence and insecurity, shed more light on the positive impacts of maintaining a relationship with the police:

“There is a relationship between the police and civilians here... In the community where I am stationed, the level of trust between the police and civilians is exceptional, rated at 10 out of 10. It means the police trust in their civilians and the civilians also trust in their police. When the civilians have information about insecurity, they come to us and inform us about it so that the police can work on it. Likewise, when civilians alert the police to a danger it means that they are already familiar with the individuals causing trouble”.

Despite varying perspectives regarding the relationship between the police and civilians and the influence this has on the confidence of civilians in the police's ability to protect them following the withdrawal of the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission from eastern DRC, it is evident that participants share a mutual concern for the protection of civilians.

However, various factors contributing to the strained relationship have also influenced the quality of police-civilian trust and confidence. This necessitates exploring police-civilian perspectives on effective civilian protection outcomes through a people-centered approach which will reinforce police-civilian trust and confidence.

5.2.2 Addressing Protection Gaps by Prioritizing Civilian Voices and Needs Through Relationship Building.

Civilians emphasized the importance of addressing physical protection gaps by prioritizing the needs and voices of civilians, particularly through establishing relationships with them.

Civilian 9, a long-term resident of the highlands of Eastern DRC, expressed her viewpoint:

“I believe it is important to reestablish a relationship. When we see a change in police conduct, we will be more willing to engage with them”.

Similarly, Civilian 1, originally from Kalehe, Eastern DRC but forced to relocate to Goma in 2004 due to escalating conflict in the region, elaborated:

“To achieve peace in the North and South Kivu provinces, there needs to be collaboration between FARDC, police, and civilians. Establishing a relationship with the police is beneficial and should be promoted because it enables us to contribute to our own protection. In case of danger or attack, I will know exactly where to seek protection.”

Additionally, Police Officer 3, deployed in Eastern DRC in 2023, described the importance of prioritizing a people-centered approach through positive relationships with civilians:

“It is highly beneficial for the police to engage with civilians because when there is a friendly rapport, civilians are more likely to share crucial security information. For instance, I recall an incident where, in the middle of the night, I received a call from someone reporting attempted forced entry into their home. I intervened to assist, and upon the police's arrival, the perpetrators fled”.

This illustrates the positive outcomes achievable when the police and civilians foster a friendly relationship.

Furthermore, Police Officer 4, who had previously stressed civilians' involvement in violence and insecurity, provided additional details on the nature of collaboration within the police force.

“The primary collaboration we engage in at our level is with higher-level authorities. We contact them, inform them of the situation, and they dispatch vehicles, equipment, or additional police as needed. It is crucial for civilians and the police to have a positive relationship because civilians are the victims of every attack”.

Conversely, despite the majority of participants acknowledging the value of a people-centered approach to the protection of civilians, particularly through building positive relationships, some civilians advocated for the proximity policing approach. This approach appears to have gained popularity and aligns well with their understanding of an ideal people-centered strategy which should be emphasized for addressing protection gaps following the withdrawal of MONUSCO from Eastern DRC.

As Civilian 2, a lecturer who has resided in Goma for over 40 years, recounted experiencing the arrival of the rebel group Adel and the intervention of MONUSCO during the rebel violence in 1999, he shared his perspective, remarking,

“The people-centered approach remains an idea in practice”.

The civilian further suggested an alternative approach by describing that focusing on the people and understanding their needs is not new. In his opinion, while prioritizing people's needs is important, alternative strategies such as the police of proximity may be more practical or effective in addressing civilian protection needs in the region following MONUSCO's withdrawal from Eastern DRC, given their familiarity with this approach.

“Focusing on the people and understanding their needs is not new, but there is an existing approach called the police of proximity. This proximity means that the police are being well-treated, and well-equipped to intervene when there is a problem in the community. Proximity would mean that the police and the civilians have a good relationship so that the civilians can provide information when there is a threat”.

Similarly, MONUSCO personnel confirmed the presence of this approach within the context of the DRC.

“If I were to make a recommendation, it would be to further develop the police of

proximity approach by implementing a program aimed at enhancing trust and confidence between civilians and security forces”.

The suggestion reflects the belief that implementing a people-centered approach, which entails engaging with and prioritizing the needs of communities, typically requires a considerable amount of time.

“I know that during my deployment, whenever we initiated a project, we engaged in discussions with the local population to understand their needs and security concerns. We organized meetings with various community stakeholders, including civilian society structures, religious leaders, and community representatives, to ensure their voices, expectations, and wishes were represented in the project. This process took a significant amount of time, but it was crucial to ensure ownership and success. Consulting with people beforehand is essential; otherwise, the approach is likely to fail”.

The reasons provided by the MONUSCO representative are also supported by the study conducted by Moore et al. (2016) which emphasized the “importance of ongoing partnerships and communication in a people-centered approach. Understanding the local context is deemed important and necessitates significant time investment”.

However, apart from the concerns regarding the time-consuming nature of adopting a people-centered approach to policing services, there is the understanding that the approach is also relevant for enhancing the protection of civilian responses. Particularly in the context of the Congolese National Police's role in civilian protection following MONUSCO's withdrawal from eastern DRC.

“My role helped me understand how theory and practice differ in reality...Any approach that is not people-centered cannot effectively contribute to achieving peace and stability. The information held by the people often surpasses our expectations, and if their voices are disregarded, any efforts by the government, its partners, or the international community, including MONUSCO, are unlikely to succeed.

People in the community might have information about the whereabouts of armed groups, but they wouldn't share it with the police forces because they don't trust them. The civilians can help the security forces by encouraging their friends, brothers, sisters, and family members still in the bush to lay down their weapons and return home”.

These perspectives provide detailed insights into the realities of theory and practice, illustrating that while implementing a people-centered approach to civilian protection by the Congolese National Police may require more time, it is essential. The collective insights from UN official policy documents, MONUSCO representatives, civilians, and the Congolese National Police highlight the need to adopt a people-centered approach as the foundation for long-term and short-term physical protection efforts in Eastern DRC. This aligns with the study by Martins et al. (2010), which argues that the foundation of an effective strategy lies in the level of involvement of the people for whom the strategy is developed, and the priority given to their welfare.

Therefore, although Congolese civilians and police share a common concern for enhancing civilian protection, the varying levels of confidence and trust highlight the need to strengthen the police-civilian relationship in Eastern DRC. This observation resonates with the studies by Julian (2024) and Verweijen (2019), which advocate for leveraging the proximity of police to civilian communities to build relationships and foster mutual understanding. However, as noted by Verweijen (2019), it is essential to prevent the misuse of this proximity, ensuring that police do not become accomplices in perpetrating violence against civilians.

Therefore, while the proximity policing approach was consistently described as people-centered among the research participants, the persistence of conflict cycles and civilian exposure to violence suggests that existing strategies may not effectively address the protection needs and challenges in practice. This study therefore recommends increased engagement with civilians and the prioritization of their voices. With their vast experience in conflicts and firsthand exposure to attacks, civilians are well-positioned to provide valuable insights on how they prefer to be protected by the police, particularly as the responsibility for protection transitions gradually to local security forces after the withdrawal of MONUSCO peacekeepers from Eastern DRC.

6.0 Conclusions

This study examined the security landscape for the physical protection of civilians prior to the withdrawal of the MONUSCO forces from Eastern DRC. Additionally, it also examined the perspectives on how adopting a people-centered approach might enhance the physical protection of civilians by the Congolese National Police following MONUSCO's withdrawal from Eastern DRC.

The findings indicate that Congolese civilians fear unpredictable violence and tend to seek self-protection by bearing arms to address conflict-related violence. Furthermore, findings revealed that perceptions of MONUSCO's protection policies and rules of engagement are largely negative, with civilians and police alike expressing dissatisfaction with the peacekeeper's effectiveness in meeting protection expectations. Meanwhile, despite shared concerns for civilian protection, strained relationships between civilians and the police have eroded trust and confidence, highlighting the need for improved police-community relations. More importantly, prioritizing civilian voices and needs through relationship-building emerged as a potential avenue for enhancing people-centered approaches to civilian protection in the post-MONUSCO era, as acknowledged by civilians, police representatives, and MONUSCO personnel alike.

More particularly, establishing police-civilian relationships could serve as a starting point, given its bottom-up focus on civilian voices and protection needs in the Eastern DRC context as portrayed in section 6.3, and section 2.3.1.

This study provides unfiltered perspectives and experience-based descriptions, which are valuable for understanding the practicalities and protection situations on the ground amidst MONUSCO's withdrawal process in the DRC. However, there is still much to understand about the effectiveness of a people-centered approach to civilian physical protection once adopted and implemented by the Congolese National Police in the Eastern DRC context, which should be evaluated in comparison to existing approaches to civilian protection.

Therefore, future research could integrate qualitative and quantitative methods to capture the diverse perspectives of civilians while also quantifying the extent to which the people-centered approach is successful and valued. The mixed methods approach will provide a more nuanced and comprehensive evaluation, enriching our understanding of the effectiveness of the people-centered approach in civilian protection efforts.

While the people-centered approach may not offer immediate solutions to the civilian protection challenges on the ground and may require considerable time, as described in section 6.4, this study suggests that if this approach had been adopted, it might have potentially led to fewer community-based conflicts and fewer protection needs among civilians in the Eastern DRC context. Additionally, the lessons learned from this study are vital for developing longer-term people-centered protection strategies and solutions if conflicts persist in the DRC.

This research holds significance for various actors, including the departing MONUSCO peacekeeping mission, policymakers, civilians residing in the DRC, the Congolese government, and local security actors. By shedding light on the potential for local security forces to assume responsibility for civilian protection in the post-peacekeeping withdrawal phase, the study offers insights that could inform future discussions and plans of action targeted at improving the protection of civilian efforts by the Congolese Police, and post-conflict police reforms in the post-MONUSCO DRC.

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Appendix 1

Interview Guide

Main Research Question: How can the effectiveness of the local security forces providing physical protection to civilians on the ground be improved following the withdrawal of MONUSCO from Eastern DRC?

Sub RQ1 - How do Congolese civilians experience and address conflict-related physical violence in Eastern DRC?

Context: Eastern DR Congo

Category: Congolese Civilians

Data Collection Method: Semi-structured individual
interview

Sample Selection Method: Maximum Variation Sampling

Inclusion Criteria:

Age range: Participants must be between the ages of 18 -65.

Location: Participants must reside in an Eastern DRC province

Experience: Participants must have had at least 1 experience with conflict or peacekeepers

Sub RQ2 - How do civilians, and Congolese National police and MONUSCO representatives perceive the role of MONUSCO peacekeepers in protecting civilians in Eastern DRC?

Context:	Eastern DR Congo
Category:	Civilians, MONUSCO personnel & police personnel
Data Collection Method:	Semi-structured individual interview, Document analysis
Sample Selection Method:	Maximum Variation Sampling
<u>Inclusion Criteria:</u>	
Age range:	Participants must be between the ages of 18 -65.
Location:	Participants must reside in an Eastern DRC province
Experience:	Participants must have had at least 1 experience with conflict or peacekeepers

Sub RQ3 - How do Civilians, MONUSCO's representatives, and Congolese National Police perceive the role of the police in protecting civilians in Eastern DRC?

Context:	Eastern DR Congo
Category:	Civilians, MONUSCO personnel & police personnel
Data Collection Method :	Semi-structured individual interview
Sample Selection Method:	Maximum Variation Sampling
<u>Inclusion Criteria:</u>	
Age range:	Participants must be between the ages of 18 -65.
Location:	Participants must reside in an Eastern DRC province
Experience:	Participants must have had at least 1 experience with conflict or peacekeepers

Sub RQ4 – How might adopting a people-centered approach contribute to the physical protection of civilians after MONUSCO's withdrawal from the Eastern DRC?

Context:	Eastern DR Congo
Category:	Civilians, MONUSCO's representatives, and the police
Data Collection Method:	Semi-structured individual interview
Sample Selection Method:	Maximum Variation Sampling
<u>Inclusion Criteria:</u>	
Age range:	Participants must be between the ages of 18 -65.
Location:	Participants must reside in an Eastern DRC province
Experience:	Participants must have had at least 1 experience with conflict or peacekeepers

Appendix 2

Interview Questions (For MONUSCO Representatives)

1. For how long have you been deployed to this community by MONUSCO?
2. why were you deployed by MONUSCO?
3. Can you share a time when you experienced conflict or an attack in your community? What happened...
4. When you were in the midst of the conflict, what worried you the most?
5. Did you and your colleagues actively consider the safety of civilians? Can you share your experience on how you helped the civilians?
6. During conflicts, how do you differentiate a civilian posing a danger and one who is harmless?
7. If you find an armed group or a civilian posing a danger, how do you manage the use of violence?
8. From your experience as a MONUSCO personnel, how would you describe the level of trust between you and the civilian population?
9. Do you think the civilians are satisfied with your presence, and do you think they are the cause of violence themselves?
10. Were you deployed from a conflict context, if yes, in what ways do you think this has affected your description of fear and protection?

11. Do you think the police officers can protect the civilians as they should when you leave?
12. After you leave this community, do you encourage collaboration between the civilians and the police for effective protection?
13. How do you feel about becoming friends with the civilians and getting to know them better?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time!

Interview Questions (For Congolese Civilians)

1. For how long have you been living in this community?
2. Do you have family or friends living in this community?
3. Can you share a time when you experienced or an attack in your community? What happened..?
4. When you are in the midst of conflict what worries you the most/what is your greatest fear?
5. Who do you run to when you need to hide from attacks in the community?
6. Do you always trust the MONUSCO peacekeepers to protect you when you are in danger?
IF YES/NO WHY?
7. What about the police, do you think they can protect you from the armed groups?
8. If you see a MONUSCO peacekeeper coming your way, how do you always feel?
9. If you see a police officer coming your way, how do you always feel?

10. How well do you think police officers understand the challenges and dangers you encounter?
11. Do you think the police officers can protect you as they should?
12. Why do you think soldiers and police should keep people safe during fights or attacks from armed groups?
13. How would you like to stay safe: with the MONUSCO soldiers or the police? Tell me how you think they should keep you safe physically.
14. How do you feel about becoming friends with the police officers and getting to know them better?
15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time!

Interview Questions (For Police Officers)

1. For how long have you been living and working in this community?
2. Do you have family or friends living in this community?
3. Can you share a time when you experienced or an attack in your community? What happened..?
4. When you are in the midst of conflict or out on a patrol, what worries you the most/what is your greatest fear?
5. Who do you collaborate with when there is an attack from armed groups?
6. During conflicts, how do you differentiate a civilian posing a danger and one who is harmless?

7. If you find an armed group or a civilian posing a danger, how do you manage the use of violence?
8. From your experience as a police officer, how would you describe the level of trust between you and the civilians?
9. Do you think the civilians are the cause of violence themselves?
10. In your opinion, what do you think MONUSCO should have done properly for effective protection
11. As a police officer, do you think you can effectively protect the civilians from physical violence and attacks when MONUSCO leaves?
12. If yes, how will you contribute to their safety?
13. What are your thoughts on becoming friends with the civilians and getting to know them better?
14. What are your thoughts on prioritising and understanding the protection needs of the civilians?
15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences and insights!

Appendix 3

Consent Form

Would you like to participate in the research project for the master's thesis Valuing a People-Centered Approach to the Physical Protection of Civilians Following Peacekeeping Mission Withdrawal in Eastern DR Congo?

In this document, you are provided with information about the aim of the project, your rights, and what participation will mean for you.

Purpose of the project

In the Eastern region of DR Congo, threats and attacks posed by rebel groups, and unending conflicts have been a major factor in exposing the civilian population to physical violence and attacks.

However, despite the deployment of the MONUSCO peacekeeping forces, more particularly the “blue helmets” whose role also entails the physical protection of civilians using all possible means including “force”, there is a growing sentiment that the contributions of the MONUSCO peacekeeping missions fall short of expectations. As a result, the DRC government has asked the peacekeeping mission to speed up the final withdrawal of its operations in the eastern region. Therefore, this research has two aims:

1. To understand the perspectives of various actors on how the physical protection of civilians on the ground can be improved by the local security forces following the withdrawal of MONUSCO from Eastern DRC.
2. To explore how prioritizing a people-centered approach by local security forces can enhance civilian protection from physical violence following the drawdown of MONUSCO from Eastern DRC.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You are asked to participate because you qualify for our selection of a resident in Eastern DRC, who has an experience with the conflict or the peacekeepers in the region. We have obtained your contact information through social media, public websites, and through referrals from others.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The Norwegian University of Life Sciences is responsible for the project.

What does participating mean for you?

If you choose to participate in the project, you will attend an interview digitally. The interview will last between 1-1.5 hours. We will use a semi-structured interview guide with questions about your experiences with peacekeepers in Eastern DRC. The interview will be recorded to ensure that critical information is included and to avoid misunderstandings. Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent without giving a reason, and we will delete your data without question. There would be no consequences if you chose to withdraw your consent. We will only use the information about you for the purposes described in this document. The data will be treated confidentially by following privacy regulations. Only I (Precious Kayode. A) who writes the master's thesis, the project supervisor (Ingrid L.P Nyborg), and NMBU's internal IT manager will have access to your information. Your data will be replaced with a code and stored on a separate name list separated from other data. Thus, it will not be possible to recognize the data in the publication later.

What happens to your information when the research project ends?

In the future, the collected data may be used for research under the direction of Ingrid L.P. Nyborg, the research supervisor. The research supervisor will not have access to your private information, as it will be deleted after the end of the project, only anonymized data. The information will be anonymized when the project ends/the thesis has been approved, which will be by the end of June 2024.

Your rights

As long as you can be identified in the data material, you have the right to:

- Gain insight into which personal data is registered about you and be given a copy of the data.
- Have personal data about you deleted.
- Send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority about processing your data.

What gives us the right to process personal data about you?

We process information about you based on your consent. On behalf of the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU), Sikt – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research has assessed that personal data processing in this project follows the privacy regulations.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project or wish to make use of your rights, please contact:

- Master's student: Precious Ayomide Kayode
- Tel: +47 97388044
- Email: precious.ayomide.kayode@nmbu.no

- For questions related to Sikt's assessment of the project, you can contact: Sikt
- Sikt – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research
- Telephone: 919 477 822
- PO Box 5782 Torgarden, 7437 Trondheim

Best regards,

Precious Ayomide Kayode



Researcher

Declaration of consent

I have received and understood information about the master's thesis project in spring 2024, and have been allowed to ask questions.

- I agree to participate in an interview where an audio recorder will be used and the interviews will be transcribed.
- I consent to my information being processed until the research project ends in June 2024.

Project participant



Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet
Noregs miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Postboks 5003
NO-1432 Ås
Norway