



DR Congo:

The international community must make protection of civilians the urgent priority; seek non military solutions to the conflict; and invest in serious reform of the security sector.

(March 2010) The **International Rescue Committee** calls on the international community to improve MONUC's ability to protect civilians in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu; to renew efforts toward dialogue and non-military solutions to the conflict; and to invest in serious and coordinated reform of the security sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

UN must ensure protection of civilians in new military operations

Last year's UN-supported military operations (Kimia II) aimed at disbanding the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) had unacceptable costs for the already suffering population of the war-torn eastern Congo. Kimia II has been terminated and the UN mission has now extended its support to the new Amani Leo operation.

MONUC has stated that this new joint operation will have protection of civilians as a central part. Protection of civilians was reiterated as MONUC's main priority in its renewed mandate, thus it is crucial that actions taken by MONUC to support the Government of DRC do not contradict this primary responsibility. This implies on one hand that MONUC should ensure that UN-supported military operations do not create the massive human suffering seen during the Kimia II operations. On the other, the UN's support for Congolese troops should continue to be subject to conditionality when it comes to the respect of human rights.

The international community should: (1) ensure that protection of civilians remains the number one priority for MONUC, the UN peacekeeping force in the Congo; (2) ensure that the UN will increase the focus on protection of civilians in military operations carried out in 2010; and (3) ensure that MONUC continues to apply conditionality for its support rigorously and ends its support to military units that are suspected of grave human rights violations.

Human rights violated by all parties

Four out of five women and girls, who have survived sexual violence in the East and been assisted by IRC, identify their aggressor as a member of an armed group; both rebel groups and government forces. Similarly, many displaced people have reported to IRC that they are fleeing from reprisal attacks carried out by the FDLR as well as attacks by the Congolese national army and exactions by local Mai Mai groups.

Reportedly, the FDLR killed 701 people between January and September 2009. Most of these have been as retaliation against populations accused of having collaborated with the Congolese army. According to Human Rights Watch, the Congolese army killed 732 civilians in the same period. Human rights violators from all armed groups must be held accountable for their actions.

The international community should: (1) put pressure on all the armed parties to immediately stop human rights violations and respect international humanitarian law; (2) ensure that an impartial and transparent mechanism, accessible to civilians,



Policy Recommendations

The international community must:

- **Ensure** that protection of civilians is the number one priority for MONUC, the UN peacekeeping force in the Congo and make sure that MONUC continues to enforce the principle of conditionality for its support to the Congolese army; withdrawing support from units who have been accused of serious human rights violations..
- **Make** sure that an impartial and transparent mechanism is established to investigate and prosecute systematic and widespread human rights violations perpetrated by members of the Congolese army, and that suspects are prosecuted.
- **Ensure** that MONUC fulfills its mandate to protect humanitarian personnel and that Congolese authorities properly investigate attacks on humanitarians and bring the responsible to justice.
- **Guarantee** that post-rape healthcare is accessible in every health facility across North and South Kivu and that President Kabila's No Tolerance policy on sexual violence is enforced.
- **Address** the root causes of conflict in the Congo, including the lack of government control over mines and the regional dimension of the conflict and seek non military solutions.
- **Invest** in serious and coordinated security sector reform that transforms the Congolese security forces into entities capable of protecting civilians.

is put in place to investigate alleged cases of systematic and widespread human rights violations perpetrated by members of the Congolese army, and that those found guilty are duly prosecuted.

IRC in DRC

The International Rescue Committee is one of the largest providers of humanitarian aid & post-conflict development in the D.R. Congo. Since 1996, we have been working to save lives, revive communities and strengthen local capacity for recovery.

IRC is a leader in providing critical health, education and emergency response programs to those affected by violence. We are also one of the most experienced organizations working to address the crisis of sexual violence in Congo. With over 800 staff members and multiple partners in seven of the DRC's eleven provinces, we promote community resilience and ownership, and develop the capacity of Congolese institutions to further the development of the country.



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Rise in attacks on humanitarian workers

An alarming trend is the increase in attacks on humanitarian workers. In North Kivu the attacks on aid workers have continued in 2009, impeding efforts to provide life saving assistance to hundreds of thousands of people in need. Throughout 2009, 125 attacks – including murders, abductions and theft of vehicles and other assets – were recorded in the province, compared to 105 in 2008. Humanitarians have been attacked while in the field, but also become victims to house invasions where staff has been sexually assaulted and robbed. Only 10 of these incidents have been formally investigated by the police. According to OCHA, the result of the decline in security is that 30% of people in need of humanitarian assistance in North Kivu do not get it. Also in South Kivu there have been grave attacks on humanitarians.

The international community should (1) ensure MONUC fulfills its mandate to protect humanitarian personnel; and (2) assist the Congolese authorities to ensure that cases of attacks on humanitarians are properly investigated and that the responsible are brought to justice.

Sexual violence against women and girls is more brutal

Congo is one of the cruelest conflict zones for women and girls in recent history. Tens of thousands of women and girls have been raped, sexually assaulted, attacked and abducted in North and South Kivu, targeted by all armed groups with unparalleled levels of brutality. Throughout 2009, IRC saw increasing levels of brutality. Mutilation and torture have become more common in relation to acts of sexual violence and more children are amongst the survivors. Women and girls who have sought IRC's assistance have told horrific stories about mothers and daughters being gang raped, having guns, wood, sand or glue inserted into their bodies while husbands and brothers have been executed for trying to stop the violence.

Despite increased focus on the part of the international community on sexual violence in DRC, a large majority of women and girls who survive acts of sexual violence still cannot access appropriate lifesaving healthcare and psychosocial support. Impunity for sex offenders is rampant and most survivors never receive the judicial assistance they are entitled to.

The international community should: (1) support decentralization of health-care and ensure that post-rape healthcare is accessible in every health facility across North and South Kivu; (2) ensure that all perpetrators of sexual violence within the FARDC are investigated and prosecuted; and (3) ensure that President Kabila's No Tolerance policy on sexual violence is enforced.

Putting an end to human rights abuses and achieving sustainable peace

Military solutions to the Congolese conflict have throughout the years proved to be short-lived and have had devastating effects on the population. The underlying causes of the conflict are complex and must be taken into account if sustainable peace is the goal. Likewise, there are no quick solutions to the tremendous human rights abuses in Eastern Congo; and neutralizing one party to the conflict will not necessarily stop the abuses.

The international community must: (1) increase focus on alternative and non-military solutions to the conflict; (2) increase resources and attention to address the root causes of the conflict - governance of the extraction and trade in natural resources, land issues, ethnic conflicts and the involvement of foreign armies and proxies; and (3) invest in serious and long term security sector reform that turns Congolese police and army into professional entities capable of safeguarding the wellbeing of the Congolese population.