



## International Rescue Committee

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### **IRC Study Reveals 31,000 Die Monthly in Congo Conflict and 3.8 Million Died in Past Six Years. *When Will the World Pay Attention?***

**December 9, 2004**—Amid a rapidly deteriorating security situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the International Rescue Committee issued a mortality survey today which finds that more than 3.8 million people have died there since the start of the war in August, 1998 and more than 31,000 civilians continue to die monthly as a result of the conflict.

“DR Congo remains by far the deadliest crisis in the world, but year after year the conflict festers and the international community fails to take effective action,” says the IRC’s Dr. Richard Brennan, one of the study’s authors. “In a matter of six years, the world lost a population equivalent to the entire country of Ireland or the city of Los Angeles. How many innocent Congolese have to perish before the world starts paying attention?”

The latest mortality study, a joint effort by the IRC and Australia’s Burnet Institute, is among the most comprehensive ever conducted in a conflict zone, covering 19,500 households. Mortality data was collected for the period between January 2003 and April 2004.

- Teams of physicians and epidemiologists found that during this time **more than 1,000 people died every day in excess of normal mortality**, nearly 500,000 excess deaths in all, and **almost half of the casualties were among children under five**.
- As documented by three previous IRC surveys in DR Congo, the **vast majority (this time 98%) were killed by disease and malnutrition**, byproducts of a war that destroyed much of the health care system and economy.
- Of particular importance is the finding that **insecurity has a powerful effect on death from both violent and non-violent causes**. In the eastern conflict-prone provinces where insecurity often impedes access to humanitarian aid, death from infectious disease and hunger is highest. **If the effects of insecurity and violence in Congo’s eastern provinces were removed entirely, mortality would reduce to almost normal levels**. Such was the case in Kisangani-Ville, where the arrival of peacekeepers helped quell fighting, allowing the IRC and its partners to rehabilitate basic health care, water and sanitation services. Crude mortality rates subsequently declined by 79 percent and excess mortality was eliminated.

In Iraq, where Sadaam Hussein’s years of brutality, the effects of sanctions and three wars have led to far fewer casualties than DR Congo, the 2003 aid budget was \$3.5 billion or \$138 per person. Precise aid figures for 2004 were unavailable. The desperate situation in Darfur, Sudan, where an estimated 70,000 people have died and some two million have been displaced, has led to more than \$530 million in foreign aid for 2004 or \$89 for each person. In spite of DR Congo’s

rank as the deadliest recorded conflict since World War II, the world's humanitarian response in 2004 was a total of \$188 million in aid or a scant \$3.23 per person.

“The international response to the humanitarian crisis in Congo has been grossly inadequate in proportion to need,” says Brennan. “Our findings show that improving and maintaining security and increasing simple, proven and cost-effective interventions such as basic medical care, immunizations and clean water would save hundreds of thousands of lives in Congo. There's no shortage of evidence. It's sustained compassion and political will that's lacking.”

The peace accords of 2002 fueled hope that the years of slaughter, displacement, sexual violence and desperation would come to an end. The subsequent deployment of international peacekeeping troops coincided with the withdrawal of foreign forces, leading to increased stability and humanitarian access and a dramatic decline in mortality. A new transitional government was established, tasked with reunifying the country.

In spite of all these advances, DR Congo is now dangerously close to sliding back into full-scale war. Political progress has stalled, the reduction in mortality has plateaued and a series of violent incidents threaten to undermine the peace process and destabilize the region. At this time, Rwanda is threatening to attack Hutu extremists in DR Congo, while numerous reports indicate an incursion has already taken place. This follows an explosion of violence in the eastern city of Bukavu in June and the brutal August massacre of nearly 160 Congolese Tutsi refugees at a camp in Burundi.

**Urgent action is needed to restore stability, strengthen the peace process and address the underlying causes of the conflict. The IRC makes the following recommendations:**

- **Stop the Violence.** The recent scaling up of the UN peacekeeping mission, MONUC, falls short of what's required, as the current force remains largely incapable of protecting civilians or Congo's borders. It is crucial that all of the requested 23,000 forces be deployed. However, more of the same will not help. From the start, the troops have been poorly equipped and trained and lacking in commitment or will to carry out their mandate. It is vital that MONUC be given the training, equipment and resources necessary to implement their mandate— to disarm and apprehend Rwandan Hutu fighters, prevent cross-border incursions and arms flows, protect vulnerable civilians and restore stability to eastern provinces.

- **Promote lasting peace.** Donor governments must hold all parties involved in the conflict more accountable, ensuring they abide by and effectively implement the December 2002 Pretoria peace agreement and subsequent accords. Peace in the east must be made a priority. More pressure from the international community must be exercised on foreign governments, forces and militias to cease violent and destabilizing actions in DR Congo. Donor governments must also insist on improved management of Congo's natural wealth and support recommendations outlined by the UN panel on illegal exploitation of natural resources in DR Congo. In addition, key governments must work toward improved coordination and implementation of the critical disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for foreign and Congolese combatants.

- **Vastly increase humanitarian aid. Save Lives.** The current level of international humanitarian assistance for Congo is abysmal and basic needs are not being met. While European donors slightly increased funding in 2004, the US government reduced its support. In general, global donors have fallen far short of the UN's funding appeal for DR Congo. This appeal must be met. As suggested by the IRC's survey, simple inexpensive aid interventions could revive the

health system and save hundreds of thousands of lives. The IRC urges donor nations to scale-up aid to meet the region's immense needs. Congolese civil society is vibrant and needs to be empowered. With appropriate support, it will be able to regain self-sufficiency and mitigate further conflicts in the region.

**For more information or to arrange interviews, contact:**

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*The complete report and information about the IRC's work in DR Congo can be found on the IRC's web site: [www.theIRC.org](http://www.theIRC.org).*

*Founded in 1933, the nonprofit, nonsectarian International Rescue Committee is a global leader in providing humanitarian relief, rehabilitation, protection, post-conflict development, advocacy and resettlement services for refugees and others uprooted or affected by violent conflict and oppression. The IRC is committed to freedom, human dignity and self-reliance.*

*The IRC has been working in DR Congo since 1996 and maintains one of the largest humanitarian aid programs in the country. The IRC runs extensive health, water, shelter and sanitation programs. We support initiatives to help street children and victims of sexual violence. Our programs are designed to help local communities meet urgent needs and find long-term solutions.*