

**For Immediate Release**

## **UN Security Council: Push for Civilian Protection During Congo Visit**

(Goma, May 18, 2009) – The United Nations Security Council, visiting the Democratic Republic of Congo beginning today, should press for urgent action to protect civilians, a coalition of 68 aid and human rights groups said today. The groups said the council should make clear to both the UN peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUC) and the Congolese army that stronger measures to protect civilians are urgently needed during military operations against Rwandan militias.

The Security Council gave the green light to UN peacekeepers to support Congolese armed forces in military operations in eastern Congo against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and the Rally for Unity and Democracy (RUD). But since military operations began in late January 2009, first supported by the Rwandan government and later by UN peacekeepers, these militias have deliberately targeted the civilian population in North and South Kivu in apparent “reprisal” attacks.

“The military operations were intended to end the attacks on civilians, not to bring more deadly reprisals,” said Anneke Van Woudenberg, senior researcher in the Africa division of Human Rights Watch. “As the operations expand into South Kivu, the consequences are likely to be just as dire. Urgent action is clearly needed to protect the people in these areas.”

In a recent attack on May 9 and 10, dozens of civilians, including many children, were killed and many others wounded in Busurungi, in Walikale territory. Reports from local officials indicate the FDLR were the attackers, but due to the remoteness of the region the information has not yet been confirmed. A UN team has been sent to investigate the incident.

The coalition stressed that while the militias pose a grave threat to civilians, and are committing war crimes, the military operation against them, known as Kimia II, has contributed to further suffering of civilians trapped in conflict areas. Rampant abuses reportedly committed by Congolese army soldiers against civilians are exacerbating an already dangerous situation.

Since the beginning of military operations against the two Rwandan militia groups, 250,000 civilians have been displaced from their homes. Hundreds of women and girls have been raped, and at least 200 civilians have been killed, the vast majority reportedly by FDLR combatants.

The organizations called on the Security Council delegates to take effective action to:

- Ensure the development of a detailed and transparent plan for protection of civilians as part of military operations;
- Ensure that MONUC establishes and monitors clear benchmarks as conditions for continued collaboration and support for Congolese army military operations, upholding its own responsibility to ensure respect for international humanitarian and human rights law in any such action;
- Urgently seek the deployment of the additional 3,000 peacekeepers, logistics and intelligence support needed for MONUC and authorized by the Security Council to increase its protection of civilians.

During the visit to eastern Congo, Security Council members are scheduled to go to Kiwanja, 75 kilometres north of Goma, where more than 150 people were killed in November 2008 and camps

and housing for 27,000 displaced people were deliberately destroyed. The coalition urged council members to meet with Congolese civil society leaders and victims in Kiwanja to hear firsthand the suffering they endured and the inability of MONUC peacekeepers to protect them.

“UN peacekeepers face huge challenges in promoting both lasting peace and immediate security, but the Security Council cannot afford to sacrifice the protection of the very civilians it aims to protect,” said Marcel Stoessel, head of Oxfam in the DRC. “It’s time for the council to pull out all the stops, give peacekeepers the resources they need, and push for non-military action to be given greater priority than at present.”

**For more information, please contact:**

In Washington, DC, for Enough, Colin Thomas-Jensen (English): +1-202-682-6136

In New York, for Human Rights Watch, Anneke Van Woudenberg (English, French): +44-77-1166-4960 (mobile)

In Kinshasa, for Oxfam, Marcel Stoessel, (English, French, German): +243-81-700-7135

In Goma, for CRONGD, Kubuya Muhangi (French, Swahili): +243-99-861-0651

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The **Congo Advocacy Coalition**, made up of local and international nongovernmental organizations, was established in July 2008 to advocate for greater protection of civilians and respect for human rights in eastern Congo. The following organizations are members of the coalition’s steering committee: **ActionAid, ENOUGH, Human Rights Watch, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Oxfam, Conseil Régional des Organisations Non Gouvernementales de Développement (CRONGD) - North Kivu, Promotion et Appui aux Initiatives Féminines (PAIF) – North Kivu, Initiative Congolaise pour la Justice et la Paix (ICJP) – South Kivu, and Association des Femmes Juristes du Congo (AFEJUCO) – South Kivu.**

**Other signatories:**

**International NGOs:**

*Beati i costruttori di pace (Blessed Are the Peacemakers - Heureux les artisans de paix), Change Agents for Peace International (CAPI), Global Witness, IEDA Relief, International Alert, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Refugees International, Trocaire, War Child Holland, World Vision*

**Congolese NGOs :**

*Action de Promotion et d'Assistance pour l'Amélioration du Niveau des Vies des Populations (APANIVIP), Action des Chrétiens Activistes des Droits de l'Homme à Shabunda (ACADHOSHA), Action Pour Enfants Oubliés (APEO), Action Sociale pour la Paix et le Développement (ASPD), ACTP, ADPS, AFEM, AMALDEFEA, APACI, APROFEDD, ASAVO, ASSALAK, ASSK, Association Africaine de Défense des Droits de l'Homme (ASADHO)-Sud Kivu, Association des Filles et Mamans Violées (AFMV), Association des Jeunes pour la Prévention des Violences (AJPREV), Carrefour d'Idées Pour le Développement Intégral (CIDI)/Nord Kivu, CCJT, Centre d'Appui pour le Développement Rural Communautaire (CADERCO), Centre de Recherche sur l'Environnement, la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme (CREDDHO), Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche en Education de Base pour le Développement Intégré (CEREBA), Centre Olame, CIDHOP, Collectif des Organisations des Jeunes Solidaires du Congo (COJESKI)-Nord Kivu, CRAF/Nyamalisa, CREF, Dauphins Muzihirwa-Kataliko, DCMD, FASI, FCA, GRAM-Kivu, Groupe Organisés pour le Développement (GRODE), Heal Africa, Héritiers de la Justice, La Synergie des femmes pour les victimes des violences sexuelles (SFVS), Ligue pour la Solidarité Congolaise (LSC), LINAJEUN-RDC, Mamans Organisées pour le Développement (MAODE), OGP, Perspectives "Monde Juste", PROFE, Programme de Protection des Femmes et Enfants (PROFE), RAFLCOVIHG Réseau, Réseau des Associations des Droits de l'Homme du Sud Kivu (RADHOSKI), Réseau Provincial des ONG de Droits de l'Homme (REPRODHOC)/Nord Kivu, SAFEDI, SAIFE, Solidarité pour la Promotion sociale et la Paix (SOPROP), Villages Cobaye (VICO)*