

**For Immediate Release**

## **DR Congo: Civilian Cost of Military Operation is Unacceptable** *Enhanced Protection Urgently Needed Due to Disastrous Toll on Civilian Populations*

(Goma, October 13, 2009) – The Congolese government’s military operation in eastern Congo, Kimia II, backed by United Nations peacekeepers and aimed at neutralizing the threat from a Rwandan Hutu militia group, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), has resulted in an unacceptable cost for the civilian population, said 84 humanitarian and human rights groups in the Congo Advocacy Coalition today.

The coalition urged diplomats and UN officials, who are due to meet in Washington, DC, this week to discuss the situation in eastern Congo and the wider region, to take immediate steps to increase protection for civilians.

“The human rights and humanitarian consequences of the current military operation are simply disastrous,” said Marcel Stoessel of Oxfam. “UN peacekeepers, who have a mandate to protect civilians, urgently need to work with government forces to make sure civilians get the protection they need, or discontinue their support.”

Since the start of military operations against the FDLR militia in January 2009, more than 1,000 civilians have been killed, 7,000 women and girls have been raped, and more than 6,000 homes have been burned down in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu. Nearly 900,000 people have been forced to flee their homes and live in desperate conditions with host families, in forest areas, or in squalid displacement camps with limited access to food and medicine.

Satellite imagery collected by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) provides visual confirmation of the widespread destruction of homes and villages. In Busurungi, one of the main towns in the Walualoanda area (North Kivu) and the surrounding 100 square kilometers, AAAS estimates that 1,494 homes and structures have been destroyed, some as recently as September, amounting to an estimated 80 percent destruction rate. (For a selection of the images, see <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/86034>.)

Many of the killings have been carried out by the FDLR militia who are deliberately targeting civilians to punish them for their government’s decision to launch military operations against the group. Congolese government soldiers have also targeted civilians through killings and widespread rape, looting, forced labor, and arbitrary arrests.

In a bleak calculation by the coalition, for every rebel combatant disarmed during the operation, one civilian has been killed, seven women and girls have been raped, six houses burned and destroyed, and 900 people have been forced to flee their homes. (See table attached.)

Sexual violence has grown even more brutal in areas affected by the Kimia II operation. “We’re seeing more cases of mutilation, extreme violence, and torture in sexual violence cases against women and girls, and many more of the victims are children,” said Immaculée Birhaheka of Promotion et Appui aux Initiatives Féminines (PAIF).

Some previously displaced people in the Kivus have returned home to areas that have become relatively secure. But the ongoing military operations have caused new displacement of civilians in Masisi, Rutshuru, Lubero, Walikale, Kabare, Kalehe, Walungu, Shabunda, and Uvira territories of North and South Kivu, as well as in southern Maniema and northern Katanga provinces. Many civilians who have recently left displacement camps around Goma and elsewhere have moved on to secondary displacement sites since they fear returning home.

The UN peacekeeping mission in Congo, MONUC, has backed the Congolese army in the Kimia II operation since March, following a joint Rwandan and Congolese military operation against the FDLR militias, some of whose leaders participated in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. According to UN statistics, 1,071 FDLR combatants have given up their arms and been repatriated to Rwanda since January. The group's estimated strength before military operations began was 6,000 to 7,000 combatants. Many reports indicate that the FDLR has recruited new combatants to replace some of those who have been repatriated.

UN peacekeepers provide significant backing for the Kimia II operation, including tactical expertise, transport and aviation support, as well as food rations, fuel, and medical support to Congolese army soldiers, at an estimated cost of well over US\$6 million. Despite such support, UN peacekeepers have not used their leverage to get the government to remove commanders with known track records of human rights abuses from participating in the operations.

“With an investment this big, the UN has clout and should not remain silent when abuses occur,” said Anneke Van Woudenberg, senior researcher at Human Rights Watch. “The UN needs to make it clear that if the Congolese government wants its continued military support, the army should remove abusive soldiers from command positions and its soldiers should stop attacking civilians.”

Reprisal attacks against unarmed populations by the FDLR militia have made the task of protecting civilians increasingly complicated for the Congolese government and UN peacekeepers. Yet the 3,000 additional UN peacekeepers authorized by the UN Security Council in November 2008 are only just arriving in eastern Congo, and the helicopters and intelligence support requested by UN officials have still not materialized.

The coalition said that disarming the FDLR militia should remain a top priority for the Congolese government and UN peacekeepers, but that they need to act urgently to improve protection of civilians. The coalition urged diplomats and UN officials meeting in Washington, DC, at the Great Lakes Contact Group, to:

1. Press for a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach toward disarming the FDLR militia that emphasizes protecting civilians. This would include taking into custody and opening judicial proceedings against those wanted for genocide and other more recent serious crimes, including the FDLR leadership based in Europe and elsewhere, and reforming the disarmament and demobilization program, among other measures.

2. Push for accountability to ensure that those responsible for serious human rights abuses, including sexual violence, are prosecuted regardless of rank. Press the UN to make its support conditional on effective action by military authorities to curb abuses against civilians.
3. Press the Congolese government to develop and put into effect an action plan to prevent and end the recruitment of children into the Congolese army and other armed groups, and insist that commanders cooperate with child-protection specialists screening troops for children among their ranks.
4. Support comprehensive military reforms by the Congolese government, with strict controls on how donor funds are used.
5. Ensure that UN peacekeepers have the resources urgently needed to carry out their mandate to protect civilians.

**For more of the work of the Congo Advocacy Coalition, please visit the following:**

- “DR Congo: Groups Fear for Civilian Safety” (February 2009 news release), at: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/02/06/dr-congo-groups-fear-civilian-safety>
- “DR Congo: Clinton Should Highlight Rape and Justice Issues” (August 2009 news release), at: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/08/10/drc-clinton-should-highlight-rape-and-justice-issues>

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The **Congo Advocacy Coalition** is a group of Congolese and international nongovernmental organizations established in 2008 to focus attention on the protection of civilians and respect for human rights in eastern Congo’s peace process. The following organizations are members of the coalition’s steering committee: **ActionAid, Enough, Human Rights Watch, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam, War Child Holland, 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) Italy, Change Agents for Peace International (CAPI), Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI), Global Witness, International Crisis Group, Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe e.V. - International Assistance, Norwegian Church Aid in the Great Lakes, Refugees International.

**Congolese NGOs:** Action de Promotion et d'Assistance pour l'Amelioration du Niveau des Vies des Populations (APANIVIP), Action des Chrétiens Activistes des Droits de l'Homme à Shabunda (ACADHOSHA), Action Paysanne pour la Reconstruction et le Développement Communautaire (APREDECI), Action Pour Enfants Oubliés (APEO), Action pour la Promotion de la Femme et de l'Enfant (APFE), Action Sociale pour la Paix et le Développement (ASPD), ADIF, AFCD, AFECEF, AFEM, ALCM, AMALDEFEA, AMUD, APED, APEF, APROSEM, Association des Volontaires du Congo (ASVOCO), BDENA, Blessed Aid, Carrefour d'Idées Pour le Développement Integral (CIDI)/NK, CDNK, CEDAC, 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 Recherches en Education de Base pour le Développement Intégré (CEREBA), Centre Olame, Coalition Congolaise pour la Justice Transitionnelle (CCJT), Collectif des Associations Feminines pour le Developpement (CAFED), Collectif des Organisations des Jeunes Solidaires du Congo (COJESKI), Construisons la Paix et le Developpement Integral (COPADI), Cover Congo, CRONGD Sud Kivu, Encadrement des Femmes Indigenes et des Femmes Vulnerables (EFIM), ERND Institute, FIDES, GAMAC, Group d'Assistance aux Marginalises (GAM)- Kabare, Group de Travail Climat, Group d'Etudes et d'Actions Pour un Développement Bien Défini (GEAD), Groupe Jeremie, Heritiers de la Justice, LAV, Le Centre de promotion socio-sanitaire (CEPROSSAN), LUCODE, OCET, PAMI, Programme de Promotion des Soins de Santé Primaires (PPSSP), Programme du Developpement Sociale (PRODES), Promotion de la Démocratie et Protection des Droits Humains (PDH), RECOPRIBA, REDD, Reseau des Associations de Droits de l'Homme (RADHOSKI), Réseau Provincial des ONGs de Droits de l'Homme (REPRODHOC)-Nord Kivu, RFDP, SARCAF, SIDE, Solidarite Feminine pour la Paix et le Developpement Integral (SOFEPADI), Solidarité pour la Promotion sociale et la Paix (SOPROP), Synergie des Femmes pour les Victimes des Violences Sexuelles (SFVS), UCOOPANOKI, Union des Comites pour le Developpement (UCODE), UPADERI, UWAKI, VODER, Volontaires d'Autopromotion Solidaires (VAS).

## Results of Military Operations against the FDLR Since January 2009

### Achievements

### Costs

1,071 FDLR combatants repatriated <sup>1</sup>	1,143 civilians killed, including at least 10 local chiefs <sup>2</sup>
An estimated 250-300 FDLR combatants killed <sup>3</sup>	7,000 women and girls raped, the majority by the FDLR and FARDC soldiers deployed on military operations. <sup>4</sup>
1,632 FDLR dependents have returned to Rwanda <sup>5</sup>	Nearly 900,000 civilians forced to flee their homes since January 2009 in North and South Kivu <sup>6</sup>
10,949 Rwandan refugees have returned to Rwanda <sup>7</sup>	6,037 homes burned ( <i>by both the FDLR and FARDC</i> ) <sup>8</sup>
FDLR partially cut off from revenue sources	123 attacks on villages by the FDLR resulting in civilian deaths <sup>9</sup>
Tens of thousands of displaced people in North and South Kivu have returned home <sup>10</sup>	Hundreds of civilians taken into temporary forced labor <sup>11</sup>
FDLR military structure is reportedly weakened, though ability to attack civilians remains intact	New recruitment by the FDLR, including of children. <sup>12</sup>
An improvement in relations between Rwanda and DRC. Integration of CNDP and other armed groups into the Congolese army, though the integration remains fragile	Several armed groups still not integrated, are maintaining parallel command structures, or are threatening to abandon the integration process

<sup>1</sup> Statistics from the UN DDRRR program from January through September 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics from research conducted by Human Rights Watch with additional information from internal MONUC reporting and reliable local sources. Human Rights Watch has reports of an additional 476 deaths still unconfirmed.

<sup>3</sup> Estimates provided to Human Rights Watch by military and other experts on the FDLR.

<sup>4</sup> 4,658 new cases were recorded by UNFPA in North and South Kivu between January and June 2009. Statistics are not finalized for July through mid-October, but preliminary reports indicate cases are being reported at a comparable rate. In South Kivu, 2,584 new cases were recorded in the first half of 2009, compared to 2,883 cases recorded for all of 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics from UN DDRRR from January through September 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics from OCHA from January through August 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Statistic from UNHCR from January 1 through September 25, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Documented by Human Rights Watch.

<sup>9</sup> Documented by Human Rights Watch.

<sup>10</sup> The returnees are mostly individuals displaced from previous waves of violence before January 2009. Exact return statistics are unknown. Many displaced people who recently left displacement camps around Goma and elsewhere have moved on to secondary displacement sites as they still fear returning home.

<sup>11</sup> Documented by Human Rights Watch.

<sup>12</sup> Reports of recruitment collected by Human Rights Watch.