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Global Witness welcomes arrest of Congo rebel leader over mass rapes

Role of natural resources must be included in investigations

Global Witness welcomed the arrest this week of rebel commander Lieutenant Colonel Sadoke Kokunda Mayele, who is accused of coordinating a series of brutal attacks in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo that resulted in at least 303 people being raped. Recent UN investigations have demonstrated close links between the attacks and competition over local mining areas.

The Congolese military prosecutor's office has opened an investigation. Global Witness is calling for this investigation to clarify the links between the violence and the fight for control of mineral resources in the area. Other commanders involved in the attacks should also be arrested and investigated.

According to the UN, the FDLR (*Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda*) joined forces with two smaller rebel groups to attack 13 villages in Walikale territory, North Kivu. The attacks took place from July 30 to August 2. At least 303 women, men and children were raped, although actual numbers could be significantly higher as half the population was hiding in the forest at the time of the UN investigations. Over 100 civilians were also kidnapped for forced labour.

Mayele, the chief-of-staff of one of the smaller rebel groups, the Mai Mai Cheka, was arrested on Tuesday in Walikale territory after being handed over to UN peacekeepers and Congolese troops.

"The arrest and investigation are welcome developments," said Emilie Serralta, Congo campaigner at Global Witness. "It is vital that the orchestrators of this campaign of unimaginable violence are brought to justice. The military prosecutor, with assistance from the international community, must ensure an independent and exhaustive investigation, including an in-depth enquiry into the role mineral resources played in these attacks."

A UN team which visited the area shortly after the attacks reported that the most affected village, Luvungi, was a major target because of its role as a mining hub. In a confidential report seen by Global Witness, the team also said that the "attacked villages were vulnerable as all FARDC [Congolese army] soldiers left in July 2010 to participate in 'lucrative' military operations in Omate and Bisie mining area".

A separate report, published jointly by the UN peacekeeping force (MONUSCO) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on 24 September, said that rebel groups and "local administrative and military authorities" are collaborating, "motivated by greed". It repeated the assertion that the army had left civilians unprotected in order to pursue their own financial interests in the mineral trade.

"The exploitation of mines by armed groups allows them to finance their movements," the report says.

Global Witness is calling for the Congolese government to ensure that the army is not in any way involved in mining, trading or extortion in the mineral trade. Elements of the army who are engaged in these illegal activities should be investigated and prosecuted. UN peacekeepers should be given the means to effectively support government efforts to curtail the military's involvement in the mineral trade.

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Notes to editors:

1. The FDLR is a predominantly Rwandan Hutu group, some of whose leaders allegedly participated in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.
2. More information regarding links between the ongoing human rights abuses and the trade in minerals in eastern Congo can be found here:
 - Global Witness press release, “DR Congo: ex-rebels take over mineral trade extortion racket”, 11 March 2010.
 - Global Witness report, “‘Faced with a gun what can you do?’ War and the militarisation of mining in eastern Congo”, July 2009, available [here](#).
3. “Monusco-Goma, Kibua joint Protection Team Report, 13-17 August 2010”. This is a confidential report seen by Global Witness.
Monusco and UNHCHR, “Rapport préliminaire de la mission d’enquête du Bureau Conjoint des Nations Unies aux Droits de l’Homme sur les viols massifs et autres violations des droits de l’homme commis par une coalition de groupes armés sur l’axe Kibua-Mpofi, en territoire de Walikale, province du Nord-Kivu, du 30 juillet au 2 août 2010”, 24 September 2010. The latter report is available [here](#).

Global Witness investigates and campaigns to prevent natural resource-related conflict and corruption and associated environmental and human rights abuses