

## **Mass arbitrary execution of civilians, including dozens of children, in Southern Masisi, Eastern DRC – UN report**

KINSHASA/GENEVA (14 November 2012) – A UN investigation into the human rights situation in southern Masisi in the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has revealed that at least 264 civilians, including 83 children, were arbitrarily executed by armed groups in more than 75 attacks on villages between April and September this year.

The report published on Wednesday details the result of six investigative missions and more than 160 interviews with victims and witnesses by the UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC (UNJHRO)\*. Investigators found that the victims were often those least able to flee the attacks, largely children and the elderly. Due to security constraints, the investigators were not in a position to confirm many more human rights violations that were reported to them, meaning the actual number of victims could be considerably higher. The figures noted in the report reflect cases documented in only some parts of Masisi over a relatively limited period of time and are thus far from presenting a comprehensive overview of the human rights situation throughout Eastern DRC.

Investigators found that the Raia Mutomboki armed group, with allied Mayi Mayi groups, was responsible for most of the killings, which were often perpetrated with extreme violence. Many victims were hacked to death with machetes while others were burnt alive in their homes. The opposing Nyatura group was found to be responsible for other human rights violations, including killings, sometimes carried out in collaboration with the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The civilians killed by the Raia Mutomboki group were mostly ethnic Hutu, while those killed by the Nyatura were mainly of Tembo ethnicity.

Other human rights violations outlined in the report include mass forced displacement and large-scale looting and destruction of private property. Investigators also confirmed four cases of sexual violence involving the rape of 12 women.

“The systematic human rights violations committed by these armed groups, including the slaughter of so many children, are the most serious we have seen in recent times in the DRC,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, said. “The Congolese authorities must take immediate measures to protect civilian populations and to combat the persistent impunity which only serves to embolden the killers.”

“The UN is ready to offer support to the recently opened Congolese judicial investigation which must lead to the prosecution of those responsible for these acts and ensure justice for the victims,” she added.

The ethnic dimension of the attacks is of particular concern in eastern DRC where tensions over the past 15 years, while fundamentally rooted in competition over land and natural resources have resulted in cycles of violence committed along ethnic lines. Both Raia Mutomboki and Nyatura have launched targeted and systematic attacks against civilians, often based on the real or presumed ethnicity of the victims, for supposed political or economic gain.

In April 2012, army desertions and the subsequent creation of the M23 armed group led the Congolese army to focus on efforts to contain this new rebellion. Important progress in tracking down the FDLR made early in 2012 by the Congolese army has been reversed since their redeployment to M23-threatened areas. Many armed groups have taken advantage of the security vacuum left by the redeployment of army units to expand their own areas of influence, often carrying out violent attacks against civilians and exacerbating interethnic tension, already heightened by the M23.

In response, the Congolese army has deployed - with MONUSCO support - several units to the affected areas over the period July - September 2012 and the North Kivu provincial government has promoted initiatives to favor dialogue and ethnic reconciliation. MONUSCO also sent several protection teams to Southern Masisi in order to evaluate the needs of the population and recommend action which has included the deployment of temporary military bases in Remeka, Katoyi and Ngungu, and 15 helicopter-supported foot patrols in the most volatile areas.

“The UN Stabilization Mission in Congo has observed a significant increase in human rights violations across the provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu in 2012 due in large part to the activities of armed groups, including the FDLR who remain amongst the perpetrators of the most serious human rights violations in the region, in addition to the M23, Nyatura and Raia Mutomboki,” said Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Roger Meece. “The risk of intensification of this ethnically charged conflict is real, and gives rise to serious concerns for peace and for the security of civilians in the region.”

Recommendations made in the report include a call for Congolese security forces to urgently take additional measures, with the support of the international community, to restore security in southern Masisi and to ensure the protection of civilians. Congolese authorities are also urged to take into account the human rights violations detailed in this report and to implement a systematic verification of the human rights records of individuals and their commanders during any future integration of armed groups into the national army.

*\* The UN Joint Human Rights Office, which was established in February 2008, comprises the Human Rights Division of the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the DRC.*

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For more information and media requests, please contact:

*In Kinshasa:*

Madnodje Mounoubai: +243 81 890 7605 / [mounoubai@un.org](mailto:mounoubai@un.org)

Barbara Matasconi: +243 81 210 8275 / [matasconi@un.org](mailto:matasconi@un.org)

*In Geneva:*

Rupert Colville: +41 79 506 1088 / [rcolville@ohchr.org](mailto:rcolville@ohchr.org)

Cécile Pouilly: +41 22 917 9310 / [cpouilly@ohchr.org](mailto:cpouilly@ohchr.org)