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Plea for Kalehe: One of the worst natural disasters in the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) deserves more attention and solidarity

Heavy rains on 4 May caused mudslides in the Kalehe territory (South Kivu), sweeping away a large part of the villages of Bushushu and Nyamukubi. The official death toll stands at 438, with more than 5,000 missing and thousands more affected.

Faced with the scale of this tragedy, I went there as the head of the United Nations system in the DRC to express my condolences to the authorities of the DRC, to the people who have been so badly affected, and also to express my sympathy to the thousands of families who have lost almost everything in what appears to be one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the DRC.

In Bushushu, I saw widows disoriented, orphans haggard, but also a community united in grief. I met two young people, aged 19 and 14, unable to move away from the mountain of mud under which their parents, their six younger siblings and what used to be their home are buried. I also saw a father in shock, realizing that all he has left is his two-year-old daughter, his wife and other children having perished in the disaster. These are terrible tragedies that speak volumes about the enormous disaster that has plunged this part of the country into mourning.

The United Nations family and humanitarian partners are mobilized to support the efforts of the national and provincial authorities, to bring relief to the victims and, above all, to prevent a public health crisis from being added to this tragedy. I call on the international community, donors, friends of the DRC and all people of good will to mobilize the necessary resources for this humanitarian emergency. I invite them to coordinate their interventions to increase their effectiveness. The Humanitarian Coordinator, Bruno Lemarquis, has already allocated \$3 million from the Humanitarian Fund for the Democratic Republic of Congo to help victims in the immediate aftermath. But this is far from enough, given the scale of the needs, including rehabilitation and reconstruction, which must begin as soon as possible to prevent the temporary from becoming permanent. The national and provincial authorities, the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, and local and international NGOs are on the ground to assist the victims and need support.

As for MONUSCO, I have already instructed the engineering services within the Mission to build a temporary bridge over the Luzira River to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and access to affected areas.

According to several conversations I had with witnesses to the disaster, it is difficult to establish an exact death toll because the tragedy occurred on a market day in Nyamukubi and many of the victims did not live in the area. They had come from far away to attend the weekly market on the banks of the lake, which unfortunately became the final resting place for many of the victims, swallowed up by the



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waters of the neighbouring rivers. A climatic disaster that reminds us of the urgent need to relocate villages located in areas unsuitable for human habitation, a demand insisted on by local civil society actors, women, and young people with whom I had a long discussion.

These local actors shared with me another complaint and not the least: the reconstruction of the stretch of the National Road 2, completely damaged by the heavy rains and which lead to further isolation of the affected villages. This is quite a daunting task that requires broad collaboration and diverse expertise. MONUSCO is ready to relay the plea to its partners and to support, to the best of its ability, national authorities in order to alleviate the suffering of the affected populations.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize that natural disasters do not have to turn into deadly catastrophes. There is no such thing as destiny here. These dramatic floods should serve as a reminder and a trigger for action in relation to disaster risk prevention and management.

At this time of general mobilization for other crises and natural disasters, it is essential that the DRC is not forgotten, and that the international community gives it close attention.

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