

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AFR 62/008/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 178
5 July 2005

Embargo Date: 5 July 2005 00:01 GMT

Democratic Republic of Congo: Illegal arms exports fuelling killings, mass rape and torture

Large quantities of weapons and ammunition from the Balkans and eastern Europe are flowing into Africa's conflict-ridden Great Lakes region, despite evidence of their use in gross human rights violations, according to new research issued today.

The shipments have continued to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) despite a peace process initiated in 2002 and a United Nations arms embargo.

In a detailed study, Amnesty International reveals the role played by arms dealers, brokers and transporters from many countries including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Israel, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, the UK and USA. The study traces the supply of weapons and ammunition to the governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda and their subsequent distribution to armed groups and militia in the eastern DRC that have been involved in atrocities amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"Millions have already lost their lives during seven years of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Armed men are still raping, looting and killing civilians – as arms deliveries continue. If the international community, the UN and neighbouring states fail to halt this proliferation, the fragile peace process will collapse with disastrous consequences for human rights," said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Program.

The new report, *Democratic Republic of Congo: Arming the east*, documents evidence that during the entire peace process in the DRC, military aid has been provided from agents close to the Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC governments to armed groups and militia in eastern DRC. The report also provides evidence of the continuing role of Russian arms trafficker Victor Bout and his close associates, using local operators, who have secretly armed all sides in the DRC conflict.

Other military aid and arms transfers documented in the report include:

Rwanda

Up to 400 tonnes of mostly surplus Kalashnikov ammunition shipped from Albania and Serbia to Rwanda with the involvement of Israeli, Rwandan, South African and UK companies between the end of 2002 and mid 2003, followed by more flights from eastern Europe in mid-2004;

A further order for 130 tonnes of surplus arms and ammunition from Bosnia approved by the US government in November 2004 against the backdrop of new US military aid agreements for Rwanda; Ongoing military support by Rwanda to armed groups in the DRC, particularly the RCD-Goma, linked to exploitation of the country's natural resources.

DRC

The existence of arms-for-diamonds agreements involving the DRC government and companies in the Czech Republic, Israel and the Ukraine;
Evidence in 2004 of an arms trafficking network linking the DRC and Liberia involving international cargo companies;
The transfer of over 200 tons of arms to a pro-government armed group in north Kivu by a local company using aircraft from a South African firm supplying UN peacekeepers in 2003.

Uganda

The Ugandan government's failure to report to the UN imports of weapons and ammunition from Croatia and Slovakia worth over US\$ 1million in 2002;
Donations of military vehicles from China in 2002 and attempts by the Ugandan government to import more arms from Israel in 2003;
Evidence that the Ugandan military authorities repeatedly supplied arms, ammunition and military support to armed opposition groups in the eastern DRC in 2003 and 2004, especially to groups controlling DRC gold mining areas and trade routes.

"International arms flows into the region have been channelled by powerful agents close to the governments of the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda to various armed groups and militia in eastern DRC who practise banditry and show little or no respect for human rights," said Brian Wood, Amnesty International's research manager on the arms and security trade

Amnesty International is calling on the United Nations Security Council to renew and strengthen the UN embargo on arms exports to the DRC and impose severe restrictions or embargoes on any state found to be exporting arms to armed groups or militia in the DRC. The Council must ensure that all airports in the eastern DRC are monitored by specialised UN inspectors 24 hours a day, and that all aircraft found carrying illegal arms cargoes are grounded.

The organisation also calls on all states to ensure that violations of the UN arms embargoes are made a serious criminal offence and to investigate all credible reports of illegal arms transfers. Supplier states named in the report should investigate whether any laws have been broken and if their arms export systems are sufficiently strict and consistent with international law.

Amnesty International is calling for an Arms Trade Treaty to strictly control the transfer of all conventional arms and prevent them being used for grave human rights abuses.

For a copy of the report, *Democratic Republic of Congo: Arming the east*, please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engaf620062005>

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>