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DRC: Demonstrate leadership to address crisis immediately

African and international leaders meeting tomorrow, 7 November, at an international summit in Nairobi, Kenya, need to urgently press the United Nations Security Council to provide reinforcements and specialist personnel and equipment to the UN peacekeeping force in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo so that it can better protect civilians, Amnesty International said today.

"The situation in the DRC remains on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe. While a long term solution is of course necessary, the priority at the moment is reinforcing the capacity of the UN's peacekeeping force, MONUC, to protect civilians and to ensure people have access to humanitarian assistance. African leaders and the UN Security Council can help to achieve this," said Amnesty International.

The organization is asking the heads of states attending the international summit in Nairobi and the UN Security Council to:

- urgently reinforce MONUC peacekeeping contingents in North-Kivu province, ensuring that peacekeepers have the necessary troop numbers, intelligence-gathering, air-surveillance and other assets to ensure effective protection of civilians, to forestall possible armed group attacks against local communities, to safeguard humanitarian operations and to enforce the UN arms embargo on the DRC in line with MONUC's mandate.
- urge all parties to the conflict to ensure that humanitarian aid agencies are not hindered in their work to provide aid to displaced people, including those who are injured. Safe corridors for humanitarian aid must be opened throughout the province.
- press the warring parties, especially the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), as well as governments that have influence over them, especially Rwanda, to prevent more civilian casualties.
- press the governments of the DRC and Rwanda to abide by the commitments made in the Nairobi joint communiqué in November 2007, particularly to end negative propaganda against each other and to refrain from providing support to armed groups, including the CNDP and the Rwandan Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).
- assert that justice and an end to impunity has a central place in the search for durable peace in the Great Lakes Region, and that deliberate or indiscriminate attacks against civilians and peacekeepers carrying out their duty of protecting civilians is a war crime, punishable under international law.

The summit in Nairobi is being held under the aegis of the United Nations, with Secretary General Ban-ki Moon set to attend alongside the heads of state of Kenya, DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, and South Africa, as well as African Union officials. Representatives from the USA and the European Union may also take part.

Amnesty International members across the world will be lobbying and campaigning their governments in the coming weeks to urge for international action.

Background

The humanitarian and human rights crisis in eastern DRC has deteriorated dramatically in the past month since the CNDP, under the command of renegade general Laurent Nkunda, launched a fresh offensive in October against government forces. In four days in late October the CNDP, which numbers possibly around 6,000 fighters, routed the national army, captured the major town of Rutshuru and moved to within 15 km of the city of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, before declaring a unilateral cease-fire on 30 October.

At least 250,000 civilians, most of them women and children, were displaced by the fighting, bringing the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the province from this and previous rounds of conflict to well over one million, and as high as 1.6 million according to some estimates. These people are in a desperate situation, without sufficient food, water, medical supplies or shelter. International humanitarian operations are only just restarting after the fighting, many IDPs remain inaccessible and some humanitarian operations are suspended because of the fragile security situation.

Amnesty International's most recent report, 'North Kivu: No end to war on women and children' ([AFR 62/005/2008](#), September 2008), highlights the serious human rights violations and abuses committed by the parties to the conflict in the province. For Amnesty International reports on the DRC's situation, see <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/dr-congo>