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Uganda: President Bush, while in Africa consider the DRC

As US President George W. Bush starts his inaugural visit to Uganda on Friday, Amnesty International is urging him to back calls for a truly robust international military force capable of protecting civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

President Bush should also insist that Uganda cease all forms of support to armed groups in eastern DRC known to have committed human rights abuses.

The conflict in DRC - a conflict that has been, in part, waged at Uganda's instigation - has so far cost the lives of more than three million Congolese, particularly in eastern areas of the country.

Four years ago almost to this day, the protagonists of the conflict in the DRC agreed a cease-fire in Lusaka, Zambia. One month later, a UN military mission, MONUC, was deployed to monitor the implementation of the agreement.

"The commitments made by the belligerents at Lusaka in July 1999 to protect human rights and to cease all acts of violence against civilians have since been comprehensively reneged on. The intervening years have brought nothing but sorrow to the civilian population of the DRC, especially in the east of the country. Civilians in this region have suffered a succession of atrocities, including mass killings, torture and rape.

"With only a restricted mandate, and without the personnel or resources needed to stop the killings, MONUC has largely been relegated to a mere observer to this cruelty."

MONUC's mandate is currently under review by the UN Security Council. On 7 July, the US Ambassador to the UN, Richard S Williamson, told the Security Council that "the international community has been too slow and too timid to respond to [the] grievous crimes" committed in the course of the conflict.

Amnesty International is calling on the US Government to use its influence as a Permanent Member of the Security Council to:

Confer a clear obligation on MONUC troops to protect civilians, and give MONUC the increased number of troops and the resources and equipment it needs to fulfil its mandate, particularly with regard to the protection of civilians.

Expand MONUC's deployment geographically so that it can play an effective role in protecting civilians throughout eastern DRC.

Establish a team of MONUC human rights investigators to document and publicly report on violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the DRC, with a view to the future prosecution of the perpetrators.

Amnesty International also calls on President Bush, in his discussions with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, to press the Ugandan Government to end all military and related support to armed groups in eastern DRC, to cooperate fully with any international investigations into human rights violations committed in the course of the conflict, and to bring to justice Ugandan army personnel or other individuals on Ugandan territory suspected of committing human rights violations in DRC.

Background

The Lusaka cease-fire agreement was signed on 10 July 1999.

To date, both Uganda and Rwanda, another major protagonist of the conflict, have benefited from a generally lenient US attitude towards their involvement in DRC, which has included mass human rights violations by their own forces as well as by armed political groups they have created and armed. Ugandan and Rwandese government forces have largely withdrawn from the DRC, although both countries continue to stoke the conflict in the east through their direction of and support to a host of armed political groups.

In May 2003, following a series of ethnically-motivated killings in the Ituri region of north-eastern DRC, some of which took place under the eyes of MONUC troops, the UN Security Council authorized the dispatch of an Interim Emergency Multinational Force, under French command, to Bunia, the major town in Ituri. The IEMF will be withdrawn on 1 September, after which an enlarged MONUC force is expected to take on the role of providing security in the region.

Public Document

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