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To all members of the Security Council

Dear Ambassador,

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that the already existing humanitarian and human rights crisis in eastern DRC has worsened sharply in recent weeks. Intense fighting has continued in North-Kivu province, with the governments of Rwanda and the DRC accusing each other of actively supporting armed groups there. Ituri has also seen a significant resurgence of armed group violence, while in the Haut-Uélé district of Orientale province Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) attacks against civilians have steadily intensified throughout 2008.

Our organization deplores the actions of all armed forces and groups in eastern DRC, which have increased loss of civilian life, and caused mass internal displacement, persistent widespread sexual and gender-based violence, the systematic abduction of civilians, including especially children, and the destruction of civilian livelihoods. We reiterate that direct or indiscriminate attacks against civilians during armed conflict constitute war crimes and can constitute crimes against humanity, and are punishable under international law.

The international community now faces a critical test of its resolve to bring lasting peace and security to the DRC. The grave concern expressed on the latest Security Council presidential statement (S/PRST/2008/38) is a welcome step. However, we encourage the Security Council to take further firm action to halt the current slide towards more extended violence, to prevent further attacks against civilian communities and to ensure that the perpetrators of serious human rights abuses are brought to justice. We therefore ask the Security Council to adopt the following measures:

- * Urgently reinforce MONUC peacekeeping contingents in North-Kivu province and in the Ituri and Haut-Uélé districts of Orientale province, ensuring that peacekeepers have the necessary intelligence-gathering, air-surveillance and other assets to ensure effective protection of civilians, to disrupt possible armed group attacks against local communities and to enforce the UN arms embargo on the DRC, in line with MONUC's existing mandate.
- * Task MONUC, the UN Mission in Sudan, and EUFOR in the Central African Republic, in consultation with the governments of those countries, with developing and

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implementing a coordinated military strategy to protect civilians from LRA attacks and to interdict LRA armed group operations in the cross-border areas of those countries.

* Ensure, in any joint MONUC and FARDC offensive against armed groups, or in any FARDC military operations to which MONUC gives logistical support, that clear plans are in place for avoiding civilian casualties and safely evacuating civilians at risk, including civilian family members of the armed groups.

* Step up pressure on armed groups to halt all attacks against civilians and to immediately release all children associated with their forces as well as women and girls held as sexual slaves.

* Step up pressure on the DRC government to finally deliver meaningful security sector reform, so that its armed forces are capable of protecting civilians in a neutral and professional manner, with suspected perpetrators of human rights violations excluded from the ranks of the national army and police.

* Continue to press the governments of the DRC and Rwanda to abide by the commitments made in the Nairobi joint communiqué, in particular by ending negative propaganda against each other and by refraining from providing moral or material support to armed groups operating in eastern DRC.

* Assert that justice and an end to impunity must now have a central place in the search for durable peace in the Great Lakes Region. This should include giving clear Security Council support to the prompt development of transitional justice mechanisms to address the legacy of mass human rights violations committed in the DRC since 1993. It should also include giving regional governments and UN and EU peacekeeping forces in the region unequivocal direction to enforce the arrest warrants issued against the LRA and other DRC armed group commanders.

Amnesty International hopes that these recommendations will be considered by the Security Council and reflected in any further decision regarding the DRC. We shall be pleased to provide any further information.

Yours sincerely,

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