

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **DRC: UN troops - inadequate training and language barriers diminish local confidence**

Inadequate human rights training and insufficient French-speaking liaison and humanitarian affairs officers are seriously hampering the ability of the United Nations peace keeping force in the Democratic Republic of Congo, MONUC, to effectively protect human rights and maintain security in the east of the country, particularly in Ituri, following the withdrawal of the French-led Interim Emergency Multinational Force (IEMF) from Bunia on 6 September.

"Recent incidents demonstrate clearly the need for these shortcomings to be urgently addressed," Amnesty International said today.

On 4 September, early in the morning, a group of people affiliated to the Hema ethnic group came to the house of a man in Bankonko, Bunia. They reportedly accused him of being a spy for the enemy, and threatened to kill him. His wife went to seek help from Uruguayan MONUC soldiers posted near the IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camp near Bunia airport, relatively close to the house. Because of the initial lack of response by MONUC soldiers a group of residents, identified by neighbours as being from the Lendu ethnic group, came to the rescue of the man and his wife. A fierce fight followed that left one Hema person dead.

When the Uruguayan MONUC troops did finally arrive at the scene of the disturbance they arrested Mr Willy Bengwela, an official of the *Agence nationale de renseignement* (ANR), National Intelligence Service, and a security special adviser to the Ituri Pacification Commission, which forms the interim administration in Ituri. Mr Bengwela was on official duty at the scene investigating events. The MONUC soldiers took him to their camp where he was stripped naked, beaten, his hands and feet tied up behind him. MONUC soldiers inflicted cigarette burns on his lips and neck. He was made to sleep on a cold floor for three days. He was set free once he agreed to sign a declaration stating that he had not been ill-treated while in detention. No reason was ever given for his arrest. Two of Mr Bengwela's colleagues were also arrested and reportedly suffered similar treatment.

"MONUC and especially the responsible officials of the MONUC Ituri Brigade, must fully investigate this seemingly isolated incident of torture by soldiers operating under its mandate and ensure that the findings are made public and the perpetrators brought to justice."

"This incident can only contribute to increased tension in Bunia and further diminish local confidence in the UN force. It clearly demonstrates the need for MONUC personnel to be provided with adequate training in international human rights standards and for sufficient French-speaking liaison and

humanitarian affairs officers to facilitate communication with local communities," Amnesty International said.

The allegations against the Uruguayan soldiers come in the wake of an announcement by a UN spokesperson in New York confirming that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has launched an investigation into the reported theft of sacred objects from a church in Bunia by seven Uruguayan soldiers last week.

"These events raise further questions about the training received and the level of understanding of the local context that troops have when sent to operate in tense and potentially volatile situations such as eastern DRC."

"The international community must offer all the technical and training support necessary to ensure that the Ituri Brigade, the newly mandated peace enforcement mission in Ituri, is as effective as possible. Now is the chance for the international community to demonstrate its commitment to ending what many have described as one of the worst humanitarian and human rights situation in the world at present," Amnesty International said.

Despite the recent progress made on the issue of troop deployment in Ituri Amnesty international remains very concerned that the IEMF's contingent withdrew while MONUC forces had not yet been fully deployed, despite sharp increase in tensions in the region that have already led to loss of life in Bunia.

On Monday 9 September Amnesty launched a report on child soldiers in the DRC in which it called on MONUC to fully implements its reinforced mandate under Chapter VII and decisively intervenes to protect children and civilians in general.

**For more information please see: *Democratic Republic of Congo: Children at war*  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engaf620342003>**

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