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ICC acquits Congolese armed group leader

The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague today acquitted Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui, who had been charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The National Integration Front (FNI) armed group under Ngudjolo Chui's command has been accused of rape, sexual slavery and other serious crimes under international law during a February 2003 attack against the village of Bogoro in the eastern DRC's Ituri region.

"This ruling undoubtedly will disappoint many victims, but it should only strengthen demands for justice in the DRC where impunity is pervasive and thousands of suspects have never been investigated or prosecuted by the ICC or national courts," said Tawanda Hondora, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Law and Policy Programme.

"With the completion of Ngudjolo Chui's trial, attention should turn to the horrific abuses that are still being committed with almost complete impunity in eastern DRC today, including killings, rape and sexual violence in North Kivu province.

"Since the ICC Prosecutor failed to meet the burden of proof, Ngudjolo continues to be presumed innocent of the charges in this case – having been acquitted of the charges against him, we believe he should be released immediately."

The prosecution has indicated it will appeal today's ruling.

Amnesty International will analyze the full ICC decision in detail. An initial review of the summary indicates that the ICC Trial Chamber followed due process in determining that the prosecution failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Ngudjolo Chui was responsible as a co-perpetrator for the Bogoro attacks.