

## **Democratic Republic of Congo: Torture - a weapon of war against unarmed civilians**

*During the past three years, thousands of unarmed civilians, including children, women, journalists and human rights defenders, have been subjected to torture in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), said Amnesty International today in its latest report *Torture: a weapon of war against unarmed civilians*.*

*In a situation of armed conflict involving troops from at least six governments and at least as many armed political groups, many of their forces use torture as a weapon of war primarily against unarmed civilians they suspect or know to be opposed to the armed conflict, the government or the armed group to which they belong.*

*Torture is committed by the various armed forces of the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda, and also by armed opposition groups allied to them, such as the Goma-based *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie* (RCD-Goma), Congolese Rally for Democracy, the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie - Mouvement de libération* (RCD-ML), RCD-Liberation Movement, the Congolese *mayi mayi* and the DRC-based Rwandese Hutu armed groups. When asked by Amnesty International about reports of torture by their forces, the authorities have repeatedly denied that they have ordered or condone the abuses.*

### **Torture by DRC Government forces**

*DRC government forces routinely use torture against known or suspected government opponents, especially those thought to threaten the authorities' hold on power. From October 2000, dozens of soldiers and civilians originating from eastern DRC provinces of North-Kivu,*

South-Kivu and Maniema were arrested in Kinshasa and held in military custody. They were subjected to various forms of torture because of their alleged involvement in a plot by former military commander Anselme Masasu Nindaga to overthrow President Laurent-Désiré Kabila.

In November, Anselme Masasu Nindaga and at least eight others were reportedly convicted in secret by the *Cour d'ordre militaire* (COM), Military Order Court, of plotting to overthrow the government. They were executed in Katanga province in late November 2000.

Many soldiers and some civilians were arrested following the assassination of President Laurent Désiré Kabila in January 2001. Those arrested appear to have been suspected of involvement on the basis of their origin in the provinces of Orientale and Equateur which are occupied by armed opposition groups and the forces of Uganda and Rwanda.

Children too have been among victims of torture. In mid-November 2000, members of the security forces severely beat two children and the wife of Mangoni Siane, a security guard of opposition leader Joseph Olenghankoy, to force them to reveal Olenghankoy's whereabouts. The soldiers threatened them with death.

"Many women have been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence by members of the security forces," Amnesty International said. However, rape is seriously under-reported because of the social stigma that victims are made to endure.

Journalists have been particularly targeted for torture to intimidate and prevent them from writing or publishing articles that criticize the government, its senior officials or its policies.

Although President Joseph Kabila announced on 8 March 2001 the closure of all unofficial detention centres not supervised by the judiciary, such detention centres continue to be used to hold criminal suspects and government opponents.

The detention system is generally marked by harsh, cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions. As a result of congestion in prisons, many detainees become seriously ill with little or no access to medical attention or treatment, leading to high rates of mortality among the prison population.

#### **Torture by Rwandese and Ugandan government forces**

Many people were subjected to severe forms of torture to punish dissidents and to dissuade the disgruntled population from joining an armed uprising against Congolese armed political groups and forces of the governments of Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda seeking to overthrow the DRC Government.

During a visit to Bunia in Ituri province, Amnesty International received disturbing reports of methods of torture inflicted on local people, particularly members of the Lendu ethnic group by Ugandan soldiers. Torture methods comprise beatings, burning victims' bodies with hot irons, regular use of leg irons and of a disused refrigerated room. Some detainees were held in underground pits. Some Congolese nationals were severely ill-treated by Rwandese forces in the DRC and others beaten or threatened with death after they were arrested in Rwanda while in transit to other countries.

#### **Torture by Congolese armed opposition groups**

Like the DRC Government, its armed Congolese opponents, especially the RCD-Goma and RCD-ML, have used torture as a weapon against their critics or those suspected of or known to support their opponents.

Torture, deliberate and arbitrary killings are reported to be carried out together with or even at times ordered by the allies.

Rape, particularly of girls and women of all ages has been extensively used by armed opposition groups and foreign government forces supporting them as a weapon of war against sections of the population that are suspected of supporting their opponents.

*Mayi mayi* and Rwandese Hutu insurgents too have carried out numerous rapes and other forms of sexual violence.

Human rights defenders involved in investigating and denouncing human rights abuses by armed opposition groups and their foreign backers have been tortured because of their activities.

### **Recommendations**

"It is primarily the responsibility of governments to prevent acts of torture and other human rights abuses and to bring alleged perpetrators to justice. Armed political groups too have a duty to prevent their forces from carrying out these abuses, in accordance with international humanitarian law," Amnesty International reiterated.

"All political and military leaders whose forces are reported to have perpetrated torture should ensure that the crime is neither tolerated nor ordered by the leaders."

Amnesty International calls on foreign governments and international non-governmental organizations to:

set up an international investigation into violations of international humanitarian law and human rights treaties and a special jurisdiction to bring perpetrators to justice.

*provide technical expertise and material resources to end torture in the DRC and to facilitate the investigation of torture and treat its victims.*

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