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Democratic Republic of Congo: The legacy of killings must end

New York --The UN Security Council should take immediate measures to ensure that the perpetrators of the crimes against humanity -- revealed today in the UN Investigative Team report into violations of gross human rights and international humanitarian law in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) -- are brought to justice, Amnesty International urged today.

“This report is clear evidence that yet again the international community has failed to prevent killings on a massive scale despite the promises made after the genocide in Rwanda,” the organization said. “It is the responsibility of each member state of the UN to ensure that perpetrators of these horrendous crimes are brought to justice and the rule of law in the DRC is restored.”

The report marks a new and important stage in the international community’s attempts to establish the truth following widespread allegations of massacres from 1993 onwards in the DRC. It presents chilling evidence of systematic killings amounting to crimes against humanity and possible genocide in the DRC and provides an opportunity to the international community, especially those states which have influence with the DRC government, to end the legacy of killings.

Amnesty International has published information since 1996 which shows that the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo* (AFDL) and its allies, mainly the Rwandese Patriotic Army, RPA, as well as the former Zaïrian Security forces and other armed groups were involved in large scale killings of unarmed civilians from Hutu and other ethnic groups in the DRC.

“We have consistently pointed out that besides the failure of the DRC Government and the international community to deal effectively with the atrocities of the past, there has also been no serious attempt at preventing further human rights abuses in the country,” Amnesty International said. In its last report the organization recorded that massacres were continuing as late as March and April 1998.

To ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted, investigations should continue through the establishment by the UN Security Council of a Commission of Experts. This Commission would pursue the work carried out by the Investigative Team. The Security Council should exert political pressure to ensure that the Commission has unfettered access to the DRC, but in the event of access being denied, the Commission should gather testimonies from refugees and others sources outside the DRC, Amnesty International argued.

“There seems to be a total lack of political will on the part of the DRC authorities to take any serious measures or to establish any institutions which would ensure respect and protection of human rights,” Amnesty International said, adding that the strengthening of the Field Office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recommended in the report is particularly key to the improvement of the human rights situation throughout the country.

“The role of the Field Office should go beyond technical cooperation. It should make recommendations on measures which should be taken by the DRC Government to address impunity for past violations and to improve the human rights situation,” Amnesty International said.

The Field Office should work closely with the experts of the UN Commission on Human Rights, including the Special Rapporteur on the DRC, in identifying a major program of reform aimed at establishing the institutions which are essential to ensure respect for human rights. Such a programme, which must include the establishment of an independent and fully functional judiciary, should receive the support of the international donor community and international financial institutions. However, donors should assume the responsibility of ensuring that DRC Government creates an environment in which the programme may be implemented and that there is a genuine commitment to human rights reform.

“The future of the DRC remains bleak. Without a determined attempt by the DRC Government and the international community to address the cycle of killings, there will be no lasting social and economic development for the Congolese people,” Amnesty International concludes.
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Also see: *Democratic Republic of Congo: A year of dashed hopes* (May 1998, AI Index: AFR 62/18/98).**