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New mass rapes in DRC are result of horrific failure of justice

New mass rapes by members of the Congolese army in the Democratic Republic of Congo are the result of the government's failure to bring human rights abusers to justice, Amnesty International said today.

New reports have emerged that fighters of a former armed group integrated into the Congolese army, deserted from an army training camp and raped possibly up to 100 women, in an attack in the village of Nyakiele near the town of Fizi in the east of the country, on the night of 11 June.

Members of this armed group were previously implicated in mass rape in the same area in January 2011.

"The inability of the Democratic Republic of Congo to bring to justice members of its own army and armed groups for crimes under international law, has fostered a culture of impunity, leading to attack after attack against civilians," said Erwin van der Borgh, Amnesty International's Director for Africa.

According to local sources, a senior officer of the Congolese army, Colonel Kifaru Niragiye, had learnt he was to be demoted after a training course at Kananda military training centre in South Kivu.

He allegedly defected and left the centre on 9 June with approximately 150 of his soldiers. The group went on to commit rape and to loot in Nyakiele. They also raided other villages in the area and civilians were forced to carry stolen goods.

Colonel Kifaru's deputy and eight other men were convicted and jailed by a military court for 'crimes against humanity' in February 2011, for raping at least 60 women in an attack on Fizi town in early January 2011.

Investigations into atrocities committed in July and August 2010, in which more than 300 women, men, boys and girls were systematically raped in North Kivu, are proceeding slowly.

Amnesty International calls for prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations to be conducted into these crimes in accordance with international standards and, where there is sufficient admissible evidence, for those suspected of these crimes to be prosecuted, without applying the death penalty.

The government must take effective measures immediately to ensure the protection of victims and witnesses during and after those investigations. It must also provide medical and trauma counselling to the victims without delay.

Background

A UN Mapping Report, published last year, which documented abuses committed between 1993 and 2003 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, pointed out that the weakness of the Congolese justice system is a major obstacle to ensuring truth, justice and reparation for human rights violations.

A draft law is currently being discussed in the Democratic Republic of Congo to create a specialized court for prosecuting perpetrators of serious international human rights and humanitarian law violations.