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## **Democratic Republic of Congo: Human rights groups request special session of Human Rights Council**

As the civilian death toll in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continues to rise, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and more than forty other organizations active in Africa warned today that the situation in the eastern DRC is at risk of turning into a humanitarian catastrophe, and called on the UN Human Rights Council to convene a special session on the crisis without delay.

In a letter sent today to Ambassador Martin Uhomoibi, President of the UN Human Rights Council, the organizations called on the Human Rights Council to use this special session to foster effective measures to protect the thousands of civilians suffering and at risk in the region.

Specifically, the organizations asked the Council to appoint a Special Envoy for the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo to report on the human rights situation and recommend the concrete steps needed to respond to it.

In the letter, the organizations said to Ambassador Uhomoibi: “The hostilities in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo have already taken a devastating toll on civilians. Everything possible should be done to prevent a further deterioration of an already dire situation. The Human Rights Council must not turn its back on the victims of the Democratic Republic of Congo.”

Notes to editors:

- At least 250,000 civilians, most of them women and children, have been displaced by recent fighting in the eastern DRC, bringing the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North Kivu from this and previous rounds of conflict to well over one million, and to as high as 1.6 million according to some estimates. Most are in a desperate situation, without sufficient food, water, medical supplies or shelter.
- International humanitarian operations are only just restarting after the fighting, many IDPs remain inaccessible and some humanitarian operations are suspended because of the fragile security situation. There have also been reports of numerous summary executions.
- The Human Rights Council is required to convene in special session if a request is made by sixteen members of the Council to the President and the Secretariat of the Council. A special session must be convened as soon as possible after a formal request is made, in principle not earlier than two working days and not later than five working days after the receipt of the request.