

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Democratic Republic of Congo: Kisangani killings - victims need justice now**

On the second anniversary of the killing in June 2000 of as many as 1,200 people in Kisangani, northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Amnesty International is seriously disturbed that the unlawful killings in mid-May 2002 of as many as 200 people in the same city may have been a direct consequence of the impunity enjoyed by the killers two years ago.

"We acknowledge the importance of condemning the killings, but the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and UN member states must go a step further and demand adherence to international human rights law by taking measures to ensure that the perpetrators and their leaders are brought to justice", Amnesty International said today.

The May 2002 abuses, including summary executions of civilians and combatants, rape and pillaging, are reported to have been carried out by members of the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) and combatants loyal to the Goma-based faction of the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie* (RCD-Goma), Congolese Rally for Democracy. RCD-Goma is sponsored by the Rwandese Government to destabilize the DRC Government.

The deliberate and arbitrary killings occurred hours and for days after a group of mutinous RCD- Goma combatants occupied the armed political group's Kisangani radio station on 14 May and called on the population to use all means to end the occupation of eastern DRC by Rwanda. Hundreds of civilians reportedly came out on the streets in response to the call and killed several RPA soldiers and civilians suspected of being Rwandese.

"These horrendous abuses are reminiscent of those carried out two years ago today by Ugandan and Rwandese troops, together with their Congolese armed allies. That they have reoccurred in the same city that the UNSC demanded that it be demilitarized is a clear indication that the UN and its member states have not shown sufficient resolve to bring the perpetrators to justice", the organization said.

Civilians shot dead included Roger Bombata, a teacher at Simi-Simi Agricultural Technical Institute, and his mother, Godée, Vicky Longombe, a student at Home-Feyen Institute, and her 70-year-old grandmother, Mbutu. Children too were not spared and those killed included 4-year-old Dieu-Merci Bonganga shot dead in his bedroom. The killings were reportedly carried out by an

RCD-Goma unit known as *Zoulou* under RPA command.

Combatants summarily executed reportedly include commanders Dominique Kamba Mukunji, Yugo, Mangbau and Nyembo.

Although the RCD-Goma initially claimed that less than 40 mutineers and loyal combatants had been killed in a fire-fight on 14 May 2002, sources in Kisangani have reported that a few days later several dozen bodies, many of them in bags, were seen floating in nearby Tshopo river. Some of the bodies, with arms tied behind the back, were reported to have been decapitated. It is unclear whether the heads were severed before or after the victims, many of them thought to be RCD- Goma policemen and soldiers, had been killed. Sources in Kisangani have also reported that many of the mutilated bodies recovered from the river had been disemboweled and their stomachs filled with stones in an apparent effort by their killers to prevent them from floating.

As in June 2000, combatants involved in the May 2002 events killed, raped and pillaged in Kisangani while members of the UN cease-fire monitoring team known as MONUC were in town.

To demonstrate their disregard for Congolese and international opinion, RCD-Goma have at the start of June 2002 banned several MONUC officials from the territory they control and demanded the removal of the UN Secretary-General's representative to the DRC.

RCD-Goma blamed protests against the killings and other abuses on human rights defenders in Kisangani. Xavier Zabalo, a Roman Catholic missionary priest was briefly detained and interrogated about his links to a local human rights group. His colleague, Guy Verhaegen, required medical treatment after he was assaulted with a rifle butt. Fearing for their safety, human rights defenders in Kisangani went into hiding for about two weeks.

The United Nations and other inter-governmental organizations such as the European Union and the African Union, as well as governments committed to peace and justice, should make it clear that the perpetrators of the Kisangani atrocities in June 2000 and May 2002 and their leaders will be brought to justice. An important component of this process must be providing reparations for the victims, including restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation.

"Victims require justice, now. No one should be considered to be above international justice. The international community has decided that former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic and former Rwandese leaders are not above the law. Central African leaders and their proxy gangs responsible for war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law in the DRC should be denied impunity too", Amnesty International said.

### **Background**

In June 2000, as many as 1,200 people, most of them civilians, were unlawfully killed and many private houses and public buildings, including churches and health centres, destroyed or severely damaged. Similar death squads from Rwanda, the DRC and other countries in the region unlawfully killed as many as 200,000 people, most of them Rwandese refugees, in the DRC between October 1996 and May 1997. As many as 2.5 million people are estimated to have been killed or died as a result of the war to overthrow the DRC Government which started in August 1998.

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