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## **Democratic Republic of Congo: Mineral wealth should not overshadow country's shameful human rights record**

Amnesty International is urging African leaders -- who are meeting at an Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit in Harare -- to demand that President Laurent Kabila of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) investigates the latest massacre in his country.

As many as 123 unarmed civilians were reportedly gunned down on 26 May by members of President Kabila's new army in South-Kivu region's Uvira town.

"President Kabila should immediately initiate an independent and impartial inquiry into the massacre and bring to justice any soldiers found responsible," Amnesty International said today. "We are appealing to African leaders to show at the OAU summit that the safety and physical integrity of human beings in ex-Zaire are more important than the country's mineral wealth."

Sources in Uvira have informed Amnesty International that about 10 people were shot dead on the night of 25 to 26 May by gunmen believed to be members of the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaire* (AFDL), Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire. On 26 May several hundred people gathered in Uvira town to demonstrate against these and other killings by the AFDL in and around Uvira.

Demonstrators, apparently carrying the bodies of the people killed the previous night, came from Kasenga, Kabindula and other localities of Uvira. The demonstrators met up at Kakungwe where they were reportedly intercepted by members of the AFDL. One soldier is said to have talked to his superiors on radio and soon after, the soldiers opened fire, killing as many as 123 demonstrators. The Uvira District Commissioner (*Commissaire de zone*) was reportedly shot and wounded in the incident. The circumstances are however unclear. He is reportedly hospitalized at Roi Khaled Hospital in the Burundian capital, Bujumbura.

Amnesty International is concerned that many world leaders have chosen to ignore the AFDL's shameful human rights record. Most of them have pledged support to rebuild the shattered infrastructure of ex-Zaire, but virtually none have committed themselves to help the country's new leaders improve their human rights record.

"In the wake of the military victory of Laurent Kabila and his forces, there has been an eagerness to welcome the new government and to downplay widespread human rights violations," Amnesty International said.

Laurent Kabila and the AFDL leadership have persistently denied reports of massacres by the AFDL, yet they have refused to accept independent and impartial inquiries. At the start of May 1997 they refused to allow a United Nations (UN) mission led by Roberto Garreton, the UN Special Rapporteur on (ex-) Zaire, to investigate reports of widespread massacres and other human rights crimes committed in eastern Zaire by the AFDL and other forces. After the UN Security Council expressed at the end of May 1997 concern at massacres of Hutu refugees by the AFDL, Kabila's government reportedly said in an official statement, *"These so-called continuing massacres of refugees are defamatory and invented by those who failed to prevent the fall of the dictatorial regime in our country"*.

"Kabila cannot be allowed to hide behind the dark veil of the very poor human rights record of former President Mobutu Sese Seko," Amnesty International said.

"Gross human rights violations by Mobutu's forces cannot serve as an excuse for the AFDL and its allies to massacre thousands of unarmed refugees and ex-Zairian civilians with impunity. A population which has suffered human rights abuses for decades deserves and must expect better."

This massacre is the latest in a series of deliberate and arbitrary killings by the Tutsi-dominated AFDL since October 1996 when they launched an attack against forces of former President Mobutu Sese Seko. Thousands of unarmed civilians, mostly Rwandese Hutu refugees and (ex-) Zairian Hutu, are reported to have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed. Congolese (ex-Zairians) from other ethnic groups suspected or known to be sympathetic to the Hutu and others thought to be hostile to the Tutsi have also been targeted.

Around Uvira, tensions between the AFDL and members of the Vira, Bembe and Fulero ethnic groups considered to be opposed to Tutsi domination have been high. The AFDL is reported to have summarily executed members of these ethnic groups in South-Kivu on suspicion of belonging to armed groups opposed to the AFDL.

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