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**ZAIRE: KILLINGS, TORTURE AND ARBITRARY ARRESTS PERSIST AMIDST INTERNATIONAL INDIFFERENCE**

**KINSHASA** -- Torture and arrests are taking place in the capital and massacres are taking place in areas of intense fighting in Zaire in the growing climate of insecurity and lawlessness, Amnesty International's Deputy Secretary General Hervé Berger said today at the end of a two-week investigation trip to the country.

“Despite the authorities’ tight control on travel to the country’s trouble spots, reports of killings, torture and arbitrary arrest cannot be silenced,” Mr Berger said.

“Zairian authorities have created a climate of intimidation, where questions demanding the truth about the role of the authorities in the current crisis are repressed. People are afraid to talk about recent events such as the persecution of members of Tutsi and Hutu minorities and the role of the Zairian Armed forces in Eastern Zaire. Meanwhile the armed groups in Kivu are committing deliberate and arbitrary killings of Zairians and refugees.”

The Amnesty International team has documented violent human rights abuses committed by both the Zairian armed forces and the armed group who control much of North and South Kivu in eastern Zaire in a report released today in Kinshasa, (*Zaire: Violent persecution by State and armed groups*).

“We have received reports about the slaughter of hundreds of Rwandese refugees and displaced Zairians by Tutsi-led armed groups last week,” Mr. Berger said.

The organization has obtained reports of hundreds of deliberate and arbitrary killings of Zairian civilians and refugees by members of the Tutsi-led armed groups, now known as *L'Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaire* (AFDL) in Bukavu, Uvira and Goma as well as the forcible repatriation of refugees to Rwanda and Burundi.

According to Amnesty International's information, about 500 Rwandese refugees and displaced Zairians were massacred by AFDL members on or around 18 November. The massacre took place at Chimanga refugee camp, about 60 km south of Bukavu. The AFDL have also rounded up and forcibly expelled refugees from Burundi, handing them over to Burundi government troops at the border. Hundreds of the returned refugees have been slaughtered by Burundi government soldiers.

The AFDL has also attacked the refugee camp of Mugunga, near Goma, causing the mass exodus of refugees to Rwanda. Hundreds of bodies have been found and buried in Mugunga camp.

“Today amidst international indifference, hundreds of thousands of Zairian civilians and refugees from Rwanda and Burundi are fleeing violence in eastern Zaire; they are without food, water or medicines,” Mr Berger said.

The delegation also fears that severe human rights violations, such as extrajudicial executions are occurring in Kisangani, north central Zaire, which has recently become an

operational zone as a result of the conflict in eastern Zaire. The delegation requested authorisation to carry out research in Kisangani, and though the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Interior assured Amnesty International access, the authorisation was never delivered, raising questions as to whether the authorities had reasons to fear the delegation's presence in Kisangani.

“Reports have been received by the organisation about killings, raping and pillage being carried out by the *Forces Armées Zairoises* (FAZ), including violent attacks on families including beating and raping women and girls as young as 12 in Kisangani,” Mr Berger said.

Amnesty International has continued to call on the Zairian authorities to end continued human rights violations committed by its own forces.

The organization has called both on the FAZ and on the AFDL to adhere to the principles of international humanitarian law through the respect of vulnerable persons (civilians and other persons *hors de combat*) and by giving access to the victims to humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC.

Investigations carried out by the delegation during the last two weeks reveal that the Zairian authorities are responsible for detaining dozens of political prisoners in detention centres throughout the capital. The prisoners are held without charge or trial and are denied access to visits by lawyers, doctors or family members. Some of them are believed to have “disappeared”.

Amnesty International is further concerned that the Zairian authorities continue to arrest persons exercising their right to freedom of expression. Over the last two weeks the delegation has interviewed dozens of victims including parliamentarians, trade unionists, lawyers, journalists and members of NGOs. They told us of beatings, rapes and imprisonment for exercising basic rights. The organization has identified 10 possible prisoners of conscience currently being held in Kinshasa alone. Three human rights activists, Floribert Chebeya Bahizire, Harouna Mbongo and Bashi Nabukili, members of a human rights group *La voix des sans voix* (VSV), Voice of the Voiceless, were held incommunicado for six days before being released.

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