

AI INDEX: AFR 62/30/97
2 OCTOBER 1997

Democratic Republic of Congo: Truth about massacres suppressed as government blocks UN human rights investigations

The continual refusal of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to cooperate with the UN team investigating reports of widespread massacres of refugees and other civilians will only serve to exacerbate the climate of insecurity and fear in the country, Amnesty International said today.

“There can be no lasting peace and security in the region unless human rights abuses are investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice,” the organization said. “President Kabila’s government is preventing the country from moving into a new era -- an era in which people can live without fear and have confidence in the government to protect their basic, fundamental rights.”

The UN investigators have been stuck in the capital, Kinshasa, since the middle of August 1997. They have been refused access to various parts of the country including areas in the east where thousands of Rwandese refugees and other unarmed civilians are alleged to have been killed by troops of *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaire* (AFDL), Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, as the AFDL took control of the region.

The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, set up a new commission of inquiry with the agreement of the DRC Government after the Congolese authorities refused to cooperate with the UN Commission on Human Rights investigation into the killings. On 1 October, the UN Secretary-General recalled the investigation team to New York for consultations awaiting clarification from the DRC Government on whether the investigative work can commence.

“President Kabila’s continued refusal to cooperate with the investigation team despite repeated promises is a direct snub to the international community,” Amnesty International said.

“Serious human rights abuses will be a recurring feature in the DRC unless the truth is uncovered and the cycle of impunity is broken,” the organization said. “The longer the investigation is delayed, the greater the risk that refugees and other unarmed civilians will continue to be killed in the DRC. Tens of thousands of refugees still remain unaccounted for, while their families have no information about their fate.”

In May the UN Security Council expressed its support for the investigation of alleged massacres in the DRC and reiterated “*in the strongest terms its call for complete cooperation with the UN mission investigating reports of massacres, other atrocities and violations of international humanitarian law in the country, including to provide it full and immediate access and to ensure its security*”.

“It is time for the UN Security Council to put its words into action. The investigation must proceed without hindrance from the DRC Government,” Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is urging the UN Secretary-General to present an interim report of the investigation mission to the Security Council and to make this report public as soon as possible. This interim report should include recommendations to the Security Council on steps it could take to insist that the DRC Government allows the investigation team access to all parts of the DRC without any hindrances, and enables it to work independently, without fear of reprisals while ensuring the full protection of witnesses.

“The Organization of African Unity and African states, especially those neighbouring the DRC, must assume responsibility for convincing President Kabila and his government that lasting peace and stability in the region, which is crucial for development, cannot be achieved without accountability for past and present human rights abuses,” Amnesty International said.
ENDS.../