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OHCHR – UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Press briefing note on DRC

Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: Rupert Colville

Location: Geneva

Date: 17 April 2020

Subject: DRC

We are alarmed by the worsening security situation in Djugu and Mahagi territories, Ituri province, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where more than 150 people have been killed in the last 40 days in a series of attacks by Djugu-based perpetrators. The attackers included members of the CODECO armed group, most of whom are from the Lendu ethnic community.

In March alone, our Office recorded 107 civilians killed and 43 injured. So far in April, another 49 people have been killed, 13 wounded and six abducted. In total, since the beginning of the year, 334 civilian casualties (206 civilians killed, 74 wounded and 54 abducted) have been recorded. The latest violence happened last Saturday when CODECO fighters attacked the village of Koli at night, killing 23 civilians.

Assaults on communities by Djugu-based armed elements escalated significantly in March, with several gruesome assaults reported. However, the attacks multiplied after the CODECO leader, Ngudjolo Duduko Justin, was killed on 25 March. This reportedly triggered infighting for control of the group, which split into five factions, all carrying out attacks.

It is worth noting that leaders of the Lendu community have mostly distanced themselves from the attackers.

The brutality of the attacks, with perpetrators using machetes to kill women and children, raping, looting property, destroying houses and killing livestock, suggests the aim is to inflict lasting trauma on the affected populations, forcing them to flee, and so gain control over the territory, which is rich in natural resources.

We indicated in a public report published in January on the inter-communal violence in the province that this type of acts of violence, if committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against the civilian population, may constitute crimes against humanity.

Despite the atrocities, the affected communities, mainly the Hema, but also the Alur, the Ndo Okebo and the Mambisa, have generally shown restraint. However, we are worried that if the attacks continue without a decisive response from the security forces to defend the civilian population, those communities may form self-defence militias, increasing the likelihood of deepening inter-communal violence.

We call on the authorities to strengthen the presence of security forces and state officials in the region, to ensure there are thorough investigations into all alleged abuses and human rights violations, to hold all perpetrators to account in fair and impartial trials and provide victims and their families with access to justice, truth and reparations.

ENDS

ecoi.net summary:

Ituri province: More than 150 people killed in attacks over the past 40 days



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Congo, Democratic Republic

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