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Press briefing notes on DRC: Attacks against civilians

Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: Marta Hurtado**Location:** Geneva**Date:** 2 February 2021

We are appalled by a significant increase in the number of attacks against the civilian population in Irumu and Mambasa territory in Ituri province, as well as in Beni territory in North Kivu province by the armed group, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). We are also very concerned about human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law by security and defence forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

According to a report by the UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC (UNJHRO)* published on Tuesday, at least 849 civilians were killed in these areas in 2020 in attacks attributable to the ADF. Of these, 381 were killed between January and June 2020, and a further 468 were killed between July and December. In the second half of the year, 62 civilians were injured and four women were sexually abused by ADF members.

The report also documents human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law committed by security and defence forces in the context of their operations against ADF combatants. From January to June, 22 civilians were killed, nine women and 12 children were sexually abused, and 81 were arbitrarily arrested at the hands of security forces. In the second half of the year, 25 civilians were killed, 18 women and 10 children were sexually abused, and 45 arbitrarily arrested by the security forces.

The second half of 2020 was characterised by a number of reprisal attacks by the ADF against the civilian population in territories previously controlled by them. The attacks led to massive displacement in the region. There was also an increase in the number of civilians abducted to perform forced labour. During the year, 534 civilians were kidnapped, of which 457 are still missing.

Violence has continued into the beginning of this year. On 13 January 2021, in Walese Vonkutu, Irumu territory, a group of unknown men attacked the Twa community and killed at least 14 people, including two pregnant women. This assault followed another attack in Walese Vonkutu a month earlier, where 10 people were killed and 30 others were kidnapped.

Given the widespread and systematic nature of the attack directed against the civilian population, some of the documented human rights abuses may amount to crimes against humanity.

The violence takes place in a context of impunity, where few human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law are duly investigated and prosecuted. An ADF attack on Beni prison in October 2020 – during which 1,300 inmates escaped – was a blow to accountability in the country.

The report includes several recommendations for the DRC authorities, including to ensure that security forces act in a manner consistent with norms and standards of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. It also urges the Congolese authorities to enhance protection mechanisms for the civilian population, especially during military operations.

The report underscores the need to facilitate access to justice for victims, and humanitarian aid for survivors, including those who are displaced by the violence. The report encourages the DRC authorities to engage through the judicial cooperation framework to curb cross-border crime, to ensure that perpetrators affiliated with the ADF and other armed groups who seek refuge in countries of the region, in particular Uganda, are tracked and brought to justice.

**The UN Joint Human Rights Office, which was established in February 2008, comprises the Human Rights Division of the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights in the DRC.*

To read full report (in French), please go

to :https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CD/DRC_Public_Report.pdf

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