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New LRA attacks against populated areas of northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

UNHCR is alarmed by a new upsurge in violence against civilians by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Since January the LRA has intensified its attacks in Orientale province, killing some 35 people, abducting 104 others and displacing more than 17,000 people. Since the start of the year we have had reports of 52 raids.

An additional worrisome development is that the rebels appear to have shifted from preying on people in isolated and remote locations to targeting more populated areas. The LRA's latest attacks have centred on the towns of Niangara, Dungu, Faradje and Ango, which lie in the Haut and Bas Uele districts.

The latest attack was on the early morning of February 24th in the town of Banangana where 8 persons were killed and 30 abducted. No house in the town was spared. A 14-year-old girl is reported to be still barely alive after being shot in the chest. On February 11th, the LRA launched an attack on Faradje territory, forcing several aid agencies to evacuate staff and leaving residents to fend for themselves. There have also been attacks on vehicles transporting humanitarian assistance. On 21 February, a truck ferrying relief supplies and food for NGO Solidarit  s was attacked in the vicinity of Garamba National Park.

LRA violence is seriously hampering humanitarian work in the province. According to UN data some 2,000 people have been killed and 2,500 abducted, including 892 children, in attacks against civilians in villages and towns across Orientale province since December 2007.

Those who are abducted are used as porters, forced to work in the fields, or used as sex slaves or new recruits. Attacks are often accompanied by extreme cruelty, including murder, mutilation, or amputation of the lips and ears - apparently aimed at terrorizing people with a view to displacing entire populations. Trauma lasting months or years is common among those who have fled.

In addition to the attacks in DRC the LRA also raided the village of Madabuzuma in the Central Africa Republic on the 9th of February, forcing people from their homes and displacing some into neighbouring DRC. Registration of the resulting CAR refugees is going on in the Kpala Kpala refugee camp in Bondo in Bas Uele district. So far, we have registered 82 new arrivals. The camp already hosts some 800 CAR refugees who fled previous LRA attacks.

LRA attacks are causing one of Africa's biggest population displacements. Since 2008, some 290,000 people have been uprooted in Orientale province. During the same period 20,000 Congolese have sought refuge in southern Sudan, while 3,500 have fled to the CAR.