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Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): Unrealistic Expectations, Inhuman Conditions

Survivors' Rights International

The international community must immediately reassess its priorities, revise its expectations, and demonstrate greater commitment and transparency in reversing the decade of warfare, sexual violence and dehumanization of civilians, and in dismantling networks of corruption, arms smuggling and international racketeering, in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Survivors' Rights International (SRI) in the strongest of terms reiterates its call to the international community to reverse the climate of impunity and lawlessness in the DRC, to demand governments and other warring parties to order their soldiers to stop committing acts of genocide and crimes against humanity, to protect civilians and refugees, and to withdraw troops that remain in DRC (verified in July 2004 by the United Nations Group of Experts on DRC) in contravention of international peace agreements.

SRI believes that expectations held by the international community and regional and foreign governments --and the respective actions and inaction of these governments -- ostensibly supporting the transition from war to democracy and the concomitant disarmament and regional peace in Central Africa, demonstrate a lack of sincerity, transparency and commitment that will defeat rather than support both the expressed international objectives of peace and accountability in DRC and the United Nations Observer Mission (MONUC) there.

The August 13, 2004 massacres at Gatumba refugee camp in Burundi underscore the continued failure of the international community and United Nations to protect refugees and civilians, disarm combatants and prevent atrocities. Noting the prevalence of conflicting reports about the military and political status (and agendas) of the alleged perpetrators and victims, SRI calls for an immediate and impartial investigation into the recent massacres and institutional failure at Gatumba, Burundi.

The continued military presence in the DRC of armed insurgents hostile to the governments of Paul Kagame and Yoweri Museveni -- especially *Interahamwe* and ex-FAR (Forces Armees Rwanda) militants alleged to have participated in genocide in Rwanda in 1994 -- provide legitimate threats to Rwanda and Uganda. However, SRI questions the sincerity of international efforts seeking voluntary demobilization, disarmament and repatriation of these and other factions hostile to DRC's neighbors in the face of the likely marginalization/persecution of these forces by the exclusive single-party regimes of Rwanda and Uganda.

Further, SRI deplors the tendency by human rights and humanitarian organizations to universally attribute all members of the external forces and political movements hostile to or excluded by the one-party regimes of Uganda and Rwanda with complicity in "terrorism" and "genocide". These attributions are particularly remarkable given the atrocities committed by Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) and the Rwanda Defense Forces (RDF, formerly Rwanda Patriotic Army) in the region. SRI calls on the International Criminal Court to investigate acts of genocide and crimes against humanity committed by all parties, including UPDF and RDF troops and their leadership, inside and outside of DRC. Further, SRI calls for an investigation of alleged RDF and *Interahamwe* collaboration in natural resources profiteering from DRC.

Given the clear patterns of atrocities committed against civilians in both DRC and Rwanda, SRI seriously questions the wisdom and motivation of the deployment of some 154 Rwanda Defense Force Green Berets to Darfur, Sudan. (SRI believes that the conflict in Darfur is not inseparable from greater political realities in Central Africa, Chad, and on the Horn, and while SRI deplors in the strongest of terms the failure of the international community to mitigate the Darfur crises, SRI views the RDF presence as inappropriate.)

SRI has received fresh reports from DRC of mass rapes and other crimes against humanity recently and brazenly committed by soldiers in Equateur, Orientale and the Kivu. For example, on July 21, 2004, Forces Armees Congolese (FAC) soldiers openly raped some 24 women and girls at the Mbandaka airport, Equateur

province; one woman was raped by 10 soldiers; one 13 year-old girl was raped by three soldiers. Incidents of mass rape and sexual slavery continue to occur with impunity in the unstable Ituri and Kivu regions.

Hence SRI again (see SRI Press Release June 6, 2004) urges in the strongest of terms that all parties demand the immediate release of women and girls who have been abducted and who remain captive sexual slaves to government soldiers and affiliated militias, to arrest the perpetrators, and investigate the complicity of military leaders and government officials in condoning or participating in the widespread sexual violence, including rapes, torture, disappearances and abductions of women and girls.

Warring parties allegedly involved in atrocities, extortion and/or racketeering of minerals, wildlife and timber include: government forces of DRC, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda; Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA); Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR); Army for the Liberation of Rwanda (ALIR); Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD); Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) Uganda; National Forces of Liberation (FNL) Burundi, and other militias and factions in the region.

SRI commends the Zimbabwe and South Africa governments for the recent arrests of individuals suspected of mercenary activities in Central Africa. Noting the recent statement by the lawyers of mercenary suspect Simon Mann that the procurement of weapons in Zimbabwe was intended to be used "to secure diamond mining operations in DRC," SRI calls on the International Criminal Court to appoint a special commission of inquiry into the mercenary activities of the affiliates of Simon Mann involved in mining and mercenary activities in Uganda, Rwanda, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Angola, Namibia and DRC.

In particular, SRI calls for a complete and transparent investigation of the award of petroleum and diamond concessions to corporations Heritage Oil & Gas, Branch Energy and Diamond Works in Central Africa. The relationship between the vast Semiliki Basin petroleum concessions (both DRC and Uganda) controlled by Heritage Oil & Gas and the destabilization and factional warfare in the Ituri region are of particular concern.

SRI calls on all regional governments and the governments of the United States, Canada, the European Union, Australia, Japan and South Africa to investigate and make transparent the relationships between private military companies and international mining conglomerates in the Central Africa region.

SRI is aware of recent cases where local or regional authorities challenged with upholding human decency and the rule of law have demonstrated their capacity to mitigate violence, identify and hold perpetrators accountable, and locate missing or abducted men, women and children. SRI believes that all parties can therefore immediately mitigate the ongoing violence and impunity and hold the perpetrators to account.

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