

For Immediate Release

DR Congo: Strengthen Civilian Protection Before Elections *UN Should Direct New Resources to Address LRA Attacks and Possible Electoral Violence*

(New York, June 9, 2011) – The United Nations Security Council should ensure that the UN mission in Congo (MONUSCO) has adequate and appropriate resources to protect civilians from attacks by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and to avert election-related violence, a coalition of 47 international and Congolese organizations said today. The coalition said the UN mission, in its current form, is insufficiently prepared to respond to many challenges posed by ongoing violence from various groups, including in the eastern Kivu provinces, and upcoming presidential elections.

The Security Council will be briefed on the situation in Congo on June 9 and hold consultations about the future of the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission, whose mandate is due for renewal at the end of June. The mission’s primary responsibility is to protect civilians. Congolese presidential and legislative elections are scheduled for November 28, 2011.

The organizations specifically urged the Security Council to address the threat of the LRA, the Ugandan rebel group that has carried out one of the world’s longest-running and most brutal insurgencies.

“It’s the Security Council’s job to ensure that already scarce resources are not diverted away from the UN peacekeepers’ core task of protecting civilians,” said Kirsten Hagon, head of Oxfam’s New York office. “The mission also urgently needs additional resources to minimize potential election-related violence.”

Since September 2008, the LRA has killed nearly 2,400 civilians and abducted about 3,400 others, many of them children. The LRA operates in the Central African Republic and Southern Sudan, as well as in northern Congo, where at least 107 new attacks have occurred since the beginning of the year. More than 400,000 people have been displaced due to the LRA across this remote central African region, with limited or no access to humanitarian assistance.

Despite the LRA’s threat to civilians, fewer than 5 percent of MONUSCO’s peacekeepers are in LRA-affected areas. The LRA is responsible for displacing nearly 340,000 people from their homes in Congo, almost one-fifth of Congo’s total displaced people, which stands at over 1.7 million. No peacekeepers are in northern Congo’s Bas Uele district, where some of the worst LRA attacks have occurred and where the LRA’s leader, Joseph Kony, is said to be operating.

“MONUSCO is well aware of the LRA problem, but simply doesn’t have enough resources or personnel directed toward protecting civilians at risk of LRA attacks,” said Paul Ronan, Advocacy Director at Resolve. “It would be an abdication of their duty if Security Council members fail to address the LRA threat.”

The organizations called on the Security Council to direct the UN mission in Congo to urgently increase the number of peacekeeping troops in LRA-affected areas, improve cross-border

coordination, and deploy effective resources and senior personnel to protect civilians. The organizations also urged the Security Council to coordinate their efforts to address the LRA threat with the African Union.

In addition to ongoing LRA attacks on civilians in northern Congo, there are high levels of violence, including killings and rape, in Congo's eastern Kivu provinces by the largely Rwandan Hutu rebel group, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), by other armed groups, and also by soldiers of the Congolese national army, including those newly integrated from the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) and other armed groups. The organizations called on the Security Council to ensure that no resources are diverted away from crucial protection activities in this dangerous area as it seeks to address continued LRA attacks and upcoming elections.

Recognizing that the UN mission will be called upon to support the elections with logistical and other types of support, the organizations also called upon MONUSCO to help ensure that the elections are fair and to provide security for voters, civil society, the media, and political candidates.

“The UN cannot afford to be associated with fraudulent or violent elections in Congo,” said Anneke Van Woudenberg, senior Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. “MONUSCO should step up its role in the electoral process to minimize election-related violence and act swiftly to protect voters and candidates from attack.”

The organizations urged the UN mission to promptly establish a dedicated monitoring unit to document election-related violence, including attacks and threats to political candidates and their supporters, journalists, and human rights defenders. Such attacks were frequent during and immediately after Congo's 2006 elections.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon informed the Security Council in his May 12 report that 100 incidents of attacks on political opponents, journalists, and human rights defenders had already been reported to MONUSCO and expressed his “grave concern” about election-related violence.

“We need MONUSCO to have the means to intervene when activists and journalists are attacked, and not simply stand by,” said Jerome Bonso, head of the Coalition for Peaceful and Transparent Elections (AETA). “Free and fair elections without violence are the only way to shift Congo away from conflict toward a more stable future.”

Background information:

- [Joint NGO briefing paper on MONUSCO mandate renewal recommendations](#)
- [Open letter to the Security Council](#)
- [More information on recent LRA attacks and failures to protect civilians](#)

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The following organizations have signed on to this press release:

International Organizations

1. Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme (AEDH)
2. Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC)
3. Cosi
4. Deutsche Welthungerhilfe
5. Ecumenical Network Central Africa (OeNZ)
6. ENOUGH Project
7. EurAc: The European Network for Central Africa
8. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P)
9. Human Rights Watch
10. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
11. International Rescue Committee
12. Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA)
13. Oxfam
14. Réseau France - Afrique Centrale (Réfac)
15. Resolve
16. Save the Congo
17. Society for Threatened Peoples
18. Trocaire

Congolese Organizations

19. African Renaissance – South Kivu
20. Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture au Nord-Kivu (ACAT/NK)
21. Action pour la Promotion et la Défense des Droits des Personnes Défavorisées (APRODEPED)
22. Action Sociale pour la Paix et le Développement (ASPD)
23. Assistance Judiciaires aux Vulnérables (AJV)
24. Association des Jeunes Engagés pour le Développement et la Santé (AJDS)
25. Blessed Aid
26. Bureau pour le Volontariat au Service de l'Enfance et de la Santé (BVES)
27. Campagne Pour la Paix (CPP)
28. Centre d'Etudes et de Formation Populaire pour les Droits de l'Homme (CEFOP/DH)
29. Centre de Promotion Socio-Sanitaire (CEPROSSAN)
30. Centre de Recherche sur l'Environnement, la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme (CREDDHO)
31. Centre pour la Justice et la Réconciliation (CJR)

32. Centre pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme (CPDH)
33. Child Protection Consulting Group (CPCG)
34. Coalition for Peaceful and Transparent Elections (AETA)
35. Collectif ALPHA UJUVI
36. Commission Catholique Justice et Paix de Dungu
37. Défense et Assistance aux Femmes et Enfants Vulnérables en Afrique (DAFEVA)
38. Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des Ménages Vulnérables (EFIM)
39. Groupe Justice et Libération (GJL)
40. Groupe Lotus
41. Ligue pour la Défense et la Vulgarisation des Droits de l'Homme (LDVDH)
42. OLAME Centre
43. Réseau d'Initiatives Locales pour un Développement Durable (REID)
44. Solidarité des Volontaires pour l'Humanité (SVH)
45. Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI)
46. Synergie des Femmes pour les Victimes des Violences Sexuelles (SFVS)
47. Synergie pour l'Assistance Judiciaire aux Victimes de Violations des Droits Humains au Nord-Kivu (SAJ)