

# Urgent International Attention Needed in Eastern DRC

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security[[1](#)] (NGOWG) expresses its grave concern about the situation faced by the population in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), particularly women and girls, during this time of conflict. Women active in grassroots organizations in the DRC have contacted the NGOWG to ask for its support and to request that UN headquarters give attention to the world's bloodiest war, act to stop the atrocities, and support elections in the DRC.

We are encouraged by the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator's recent recognition of the eastern DRC as the world's most neglected humanitarian emergency[[2](#)] and the UN's recent initiatives to respond to the allegations of widespread sexual exploitation and abuse by the UN's Mission in the DRC (MONUC) personnel. We support the Secretary-General's recent call for more police and French speaking investigators in the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse in MONUC[[3](#)] and hope this call is heeded by Member States, with the requested personnel deployed as soon as possible. We are further encouraged by the new measures introduced in MONUC to respond to the cases of sexual exploitation and abuse and to attempt to prevent new cases. These new measures, however, must be complemented by concerted action at the national level, such as through the provision of systematic pre-deployment gender training and training on sexual exploitation and abuse. As such, we applaud the UN's recognition of and encourage the UN to emphasize, the absence of funds for these and other peace-building operations in the DRC.

It is estimated that in the past six years, 3.8 million people have died through destitution or disease as a result of the war in the DRC[[4](#)]. According to Jan Egeland, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, some 1,000 deaths a day in the region are preventable. In addition to the sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by armed groups, women, and children have been further victimized by widespread sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by personnel from MONUC[[5](#)]. The NGOWG recognizes the Secretary-General's recommendation to sanction groups using child soldiers[[6](#)] and the recognition that sexual abuse in the DRC has become arguably worse there than any other place in the world[[7](#)].

This emergency is compounded by the complexity of the conflict, with as many as 20 different armed actors at any one time[[8](#)]. Recently, two conflicts, the first involving two tribal militias armed by Uganda, and the second, armed by Rwanda, caused the flight of 20,000 refugees from north-eastern DRC into Uganda[[9](#)]. These incidences are evidence of the fact that the Republic of Rwanda and the Republic of Uganda continue to violate the 1999 Lusaka Peace Agreement and the 2002 Pretoria Agreement. The NGOWG calls upon the Security Council to address the deviations from these internationally recognized agreements and the massive devastation and long-lasting effects of such barbaric behavior, especially by expanding the force of MONUC.

On 7 January 2005, suggestion of the possible postponement of the June elections from the head of the country's electoral commission resulted in riots in a nation already in crisis[[10](#)]. The NGOWG further urges the United Nations and the international community to recognize the importance of, and mobilizing to support democratic elections in the DRC as soon as possible. We believe that a national government legitimated by elections is an essential stepping-stone towards achieving a stable source of guidance in a region in desperate need of help[[11](#)]. The NGOWG urges the Security Council to ensure the promotion of SCR 1325 by implementing programs to promote women's involvement and participation in the elections.

Additionally, the international community must use all methods available to put a stop to the crimes occurring in the DRC and to assist its rehabilitation.

- [1] The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security was formed in May 2000 to advocate for a UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) on women, peace and security. This was achieved collaboratively with the unanimous adoption of SCR 1325 on 31 October 2000. Now, the NGOWG advocates for and monitors the participation of women, prevention of conflict and protection of all civilians, to ensure full and rapid implementation of SCR 1325's promises.
- [2] UN News Service press release, "Eastern DR of Congo Surpasses Darfur as the Biggest, Most Neglected Emergency", New York, March 16, 2005
- [3] See the Secretary-General's letter to the Security Council, February 9, 2005. The report by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services revealed that MONUC personnel engaged in sexual exploitation and abuse of Congolese women and girls, with payment ranging from two eggs to \$5 per encounter.
- [4] The Economist, An Almost Hopeless Case, January 22, 2005. According to the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reports, Rwanda also invaded the DRC in both 1996 and in 1998 under the guise of flushing out Hutu combatants based in Eastern Congo.
- [5] See the Secretary-Generals' report on the "Investigation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services into allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo" (A/59/661)
- [6] Wall Street Journal, February 10, 2005. According to IRIN report, 30% of combatants are children.
- [7] See UN News Service press release, Eastern DR of Congo Surpasses Darfur as the Biggest, Most Neglected Emergency, New York, March 16, 2005.
- [8] Id.
- [9] The Economist, An Almost Hopeless Case, January 22, 2005.
- [10] Id.
- [11] Id. Currently, the DRC does not have a centralized government, and instead has four vice presidents representing its four regions