



## **CHILDREN CONTINUE TO BE RAVAGED BY ARMED CONFLICT IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO DESPIRE SIGNS OF PROGRESS**

**April 26, 2006, Kinshasa and New York** – Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continue to endure some of the most inhumane treatment found anywhere in the world, despite outward signs of progress, according to a new report by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. The report, *Struggling to Survive: Children in Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, documents dozens of continued, pervasive and egregious violations against children by all armed forces and groups operating in DRC and urges that immediate actions be taken to protect Congolese children and to hold the perpetrators of crimes against children accountable.

“Despite the presence of the United Nations’ largest peacekeeping operation, the promise of upcoming elections and billions of dollars granted by donors for post-conflict reconstruction in DRC, most Congolese children are not faring any better than they were three years ago – and for some children, health, safety and well-being have drastically deteriorated,” said Julia Freedson, Director of Watchlist, a global network of non-governmental organizations based in New York.

*Struggling to Survive* details heinous violations against children’s security and rights in each of the six major categories identified by the United Nations Security Council. These categories include killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, abduction of children, denial of humanitarian assistance for children, attacks on schools and hospitals and recruitment and use of children into armed forces and groups. In addition, the report documents a multitude of other abuses, including forced displacement of children, coercion of children into the illegal exploitation of natural resources and arbitrary detention of children.

Violations against children are committed against a backdrop of outward progress towards reconstruction in DRC, such as the demobilization of thousands of children from armed forces and groups, the significant decrease in the number of displaced people in some areas, serious efforts to confront sexual violence and exploitation and the integration of combatants from armed groups into a unified national army. Another recent positive step taken was the International Criminal Court’s arrest of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo of the Union des Patriotes Congolais on charges of enlisting, conscripting and using children in hostilities in DRC.

“Outward signs of progress should not lull the international community into a false sense that children in DRC now live in safety,” warned Kathleen Hunt, CARE International’s UN Representative and Chairperson of the Watchlist. “To the contrary, stark evidence of the ongoing rape and mutilation of girls, recruitment and use of children by armed groups and other despicable abuses against children continues to be well-documented. In addition, it’s widely known that thousands of Congolese children are dying of preventable diseases every day and others are missing out on educational opportunities and other possibilities for advancing their lives.”

“The Congolese governing authorities, the UN team and others have yet to implement an effective structure of child protection in DRC. A wide gap remains between commitments to protect children in theory and actual practices on the ground. The widespread trafficking of small arms, difficulties in the disarmament and demobilization process, and the persistence of general insecurity in the eastern DRC will continue to contribute in the weak structure for protection of children for the foreseeable future,” said Beck - Bukeni T. Waruzi, Director of Ajedi-Ka /Child Soldiers Project, a local child protection agency operating in eastern DRC.

“Immediate and sustained actions must be taken immediately by the governing authorities of DRC, all armed groups operating in DRC, the UN Security Council, the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), the humanitarian community in DRC, donors and the International Criminal Court to protect Congolese children from further violations and to find remedies for those who have already endured imponderable suffering,” Hunt added.

Watchlist’s report is being released today at events in Kinshasa, DRC and at the UN headquarters in New York. A copy of the report is available at [www.watchlist.org](http://www.watchlist.org). Interviews with experts on children in DRC can be arranged available.