



Watchlist Deplores Widespread Abuses Against Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo Calls on UN Security Council for Action

June 16, 2003, New York. Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have suffered systematic torture and cruelty during Congo's five-year war, according to a new report by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. Both foreign and domestic governments and armed groups have committed gross violations against children, including assault, rape, abduction, sexual torture, forced displacement, underage recruitment into armed forces and forced participation in the illegal exploitation of natural resources.

In a 36-page report, released today to coincide with the end of the UN Security Council's mission to DRC and neighboring countries, the Watchlist calls on all parties to the conflict to immediately halt violations against children and adolescents. The Watchlist also calls on the Security Council to work vigorously to ensure an end to abuses committed by parties to the conflict and international personnel stationed in DRC.

"Every day gross atrocities are being committed against Congolese children," said Julia Freedson, Coordinator of the Watchlist. "The Security Council must give higher priority to protecting the lives and rights of children and holding the perpetrators of these crimes accountable."

The war in DRC has claimed an estimated 3.3 million lives, mostly those of women and children, since 1998. Many children, especially those in the eastern area of the country, lack basic health services, education and access to humanitarian assistance, according to the report.

The Watchlist urges parties to the conflict and the international community to give special attention to the security and rights of children in peace negotiations and throughout the transitional period.

"We are urging donors to provide the UN peacekeeping operation in DRC, UNICEF and implementing partners with sufficient human and financial resources to protect Congolese children now and throughout the transition to peace," said Eldrid Kvamen Midttun, of Norwegian Refugee Council and a Watchlist steering committee member. "Funds should not be contingent on peace. The need for emergency and humanitarian services is immediate and critical."

The Watchlist is an initiative of non-governmental organizations to improve monitoring, reporting and follow-up action on the impact of conflict on children in specific situations of armed conflict. Previous Watchlist reports are available at www.watchlist.org

THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON CHILDREN IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

FACT SHEET

The Impact of Conflict on Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a 36-page report released today by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict documents the following situation in DRC :

- Over 12 percent of children do not reach their first birthday ;
- 3 million children are without access to education;
- Malnutrition rates exceed 40% in some areas;
- 400,000 primary-aged children have been displaced from their homes;
- Tens of thousands of children have been recruited as child soldiers;
- Gender-based violence, including rape of girls, is widespread.

The war in DRC has claimed an estimated 3.3 million lives, mostly women and children, since 1998. In Ituri District, the site of recent violence, children have been forced to witness parents and grandparents being hacked to death; young girls raped in front of their families; children forced to kill their close relatives; children and other hospital patients dragged from their beds and killed; children, including infants, dying after being locked up without food or water; and children killed, some shot in the back, in massacres along with hundreds of other civilians.

The full report is available at www.watchlist.org