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The ITUC Deeply Shocked by the Mass Rapes in Eastern Congo

Brussels, 27 August 2010 (ITUC OnLine): A joint UN mission has confirmed the rape of at least 154 civilian girls and women around the village of Luvungi in North Kivu, although according to local aid workers the number of victims may be as high as 220. Women were raped during four days, from July 30 up to August 3rd, allegedly by the Mai-Mai militia and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a group of ethnic Hutu fighters linked to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The UN peace keeping mission present in the region uncovered the crimes only ten days later, on August 12.

The ITUC is outraged by the cruelty and the scale of these crimes. Rape and other sexual violence have been systematically used in the region as a weapon of war to spread fear and ethnic cleansing for over a decade. The ITUC deplores that despite many high-level missions and reports, acts of extreme violence against women have only increased over the years. In 2009 the UNFPA (UN Fund for Population) reported more than 9,000 cases of rape in North and South Kivu provinces alone. Many more cases are thought to go unreported.

“The violence endured by women in Eastern Congo can no longer be tolerated. The whole world should stand up and say this must come to an end”, says Sharan Burrow, the ITUC general secretary, the first woman to hold that position. One of the main causes of the armed conflict in the region is the fight for control over its natural resource wealth, which in turn finances the war and fuels sexual violence on an unprecedented scale.

The failure of the MONUSCO, the UN peace-keeping mission in DRC, to prevent these crimes and the fact that it has only now discovered them, call into question its capacity to fulfil its mandate under current conditions. In that regard the ITUC is particularly concerned about the recent withdrawal of over 1,500 peacekeepers from the MONUSCO contingent when the Congolese authorities do not seem to be able to protect civilians and ensure security in the region.

The ITUC welcomes the position of the UN Security Council, which has called for a swift investigation of the attacks and the prosecution of the perpetrators of crimes. However, this will not be sufficient to prevent other crimes. The ITUC calls upon the international community and the government of Congo to intensify their work for a lasting and sustainable solution to the conflict.

“There is an urgent need to consolidate peace in eastern DR Congo. This can only be done by addressing all the different aspects of the conflict, including the illegal exploitation of natural resources, the many governance deficits, the prevailing poverty and the lack of decent work opportunities for men and women,” concluded Sharan Burrow.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 156 countries and territories and has 312 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org> y <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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