

Cluster Protection

Republique Democratique du Congo



Civilians targeted in current fighting in the Kivus

(1 June 2012, Goma/Bukavu – Democratic Republic of Congo) – The Protection Cluster is alarmed by the resurgence of violence targeting civilians during armed clashes in eastern DRC in recent weeks.

Since the end of April 2012, security for the civilian population has deteriorated considerably in both North and South Kivu as a result of fighting between the Congolese armed forces and (FARDC) and renegade soldiers. According the United Nations' latest figures, about 100,000 people have been forced to flee their homes to escape the violence since late April.

The defections from the Congolese army, and the redeployment of troops to the combat areas in North Kivu, have also created a security vacuum in several areas, leaving civilians at the mercy of domestic and foreign armed groups. Civilians are increasingly being targeted by all parties to the conflict, and are often victims of reprisals for their supposed links with enemy groups or the Congolese army.

“The attacks of the past month have clearly marked a deterioration in the protection of civilians”, Alain Homsy, country director of the Norwegian Refugee Council in DRC, said. “Local communities feel increasingly vulnerable to attacks”.

Villages were constantly the target of new raids and many people, including women and children, were the victims of murder, violence and looting. Members of the Protection Cluster have also observed an increase in the number of children being recruited by armed groups to become soldiers, as well as numerous cases of sexual violence committed by members of the armed groups and the Congolese army. Even in areas where they have fled to find safety, civilians are still facing forced labour, extortion, looting and pressure by armed groups to return to their home areas.

« We urge all parties to the conflict to respect the rights of civilians as well as their obligations under humanitarian law », Stefano Severe, Regional Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, declared. « It is not only imperative that armed actors put an end to the exactions of their members against civilian populations, but also that they allow humanitarian access to the United Nations agencies and NGOs, whose mandate is to provide protection and assistance to civilians ».

In response to the deterioration of the protection of civilians in the Kivus, the Protection Cluster calls on the DRC government to make all necessary efforts to ensure the protection of its population. The presence of trained and equipped army and police units are essential to ensuring the security of civilians during and after the military operations. These measures should also include the prosecution of FARDC members suspected of [human rights] violations against civilians, payment of salaries, and the provision of food rations and other necessary resources.

MONUSCO, the United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of Congo, also has a crucial role to play in the protection of civilians. MONUSCO, including its armed units, should retain

its mandate and all of its capacity to continue and reinforce protection measures, as well as respond to the civilian population's need for security.

Information for the editors:

The Protection Cluster is the coordination forum for international and national civilian organizations responding to issues surrounding the protection of civilians affected by armed conflicts in the DRC. Clusters are sectoral humanitarian coordination groups bringing together concerned organizations under the coordination of an international agency. The Protection Cluster in DRC is coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and brings together about 40 member organizations.

Several serious incidents against civilian populations were reported in eastern DRC in May 2012. See examples of the most severe cases below:

- Incursions into several villages in the Ufamandu 1 district (Masisi, North Kivu) by non-state armed groups, on the 12 and 14 May 2012. 50 houses burned and at least 5 people killed.
- Massacres by non-state armed groups in Lumendja (South Kivu) on 5 May, in Kamangana on 13 and 14 May and attacks against the MONUSCO on 15 May. At least 65 people killed, including several burnt alive. Numerous houses torched.

39 cases of sexual violence against women were reported between 27 April and 20 May 2012 in North Kivu province alone. All of these cases were attributed to men in arms. Among these cases, at least 7 were perpetrated during clashes and at least 6 cases during the displacement of the population in flight. Because of population movements, fear of reprisals and limited access to care services for victims, these figures only represent a portion of the cases of sexual violence in the province.

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