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PRESS RELEASE

“Massacres continue in Congo at hands of armed groups and Congolese army”, says UN expert

KINSHASA, 15 October 2009:

Government troops in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have killed scores of civilians in eastern Congo this year, according to a report by Professor Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions. Alston has just completed an eleven day investigation in which he travelled widely in the country.

“Congolese soldiers shot and beat to death at least 50 Rwandan Hutu refugees, and burnt their camp to the ground in an attack in April 2009. Some 40 women were abducted from the camp. A small group of 10 who escaped described being gang raped, and had severe injuries – some had chunks of their breasts hacked off,” said Alston. The killings took place in the Shalio area of North Kivu in eastern Congo. Reports of other very recent killings carried out by the FARDC, the DRC’s army, are also beginning to emerge, he added. “An immediate, independent, and thorough investigation into these killings is essential”, he said.

The killings occurred in the context of an ongoing joint DRC-UN military operation to weed out the FDLR, an armed group composed partly of ex-Rwandan ‘genocidaires’ and others that has destabilized eastern Congo for over a decade. But the joint operation has been so poorly carried out that the FDLR has easily been able to re-enter villages abandoned by the Congolese and UN forces and commit brutal retaliation massacres of civilians.

“From a human rights perspective, the operation has been catastrophic”, Alston said. “Hundreds of thousands have been displaced, hundreds of villages burnt to the ground, and at least 1,000 civilians have been killed. Women and girls have literally been raped to death in the most gruesome attacks imaginable.”

Alston also investigated killings in Orientale Province, in the far north of the Congo, bordering Sudan and Uganda. “The situation in Orientale is a powder keg and neither the Government nor the international community are giving sufficient attention to it,” Alston concluded. “The Government claims to have pushed the Lord’s Resistance Army out of the Congo and is ready to declare victory. But the sad reality is that the LRA is still very much in business in Orientale. Killings and kidnappings continue apace.” The LRA is a guerilla force that essentially consists of children abducted by Joseph Kony, a man wanted by the ICC for war crimes. “Far from being finished off, the LRA has turned itself into a regional problem that now requires a regional solution, but none is apparently contemplated”, said Alston. He expressed particular concern at the fact that the Government “has recently dispatched troops to the area who are best known for raping and killing civilians and looting in other parts of the country.”

Since September 2008, over 1,200 civilians have been brutally killed by the LRA in the Congo. Many of these killings were predictable revenge massacres following Government and UN military operations, and Alston concluded that both the Government and the UN failed in their responsibility to prioritize civilian protection in their planning. The LRA has a long-established pattern in Uganda and Sudan of targeting civilians in retaliation for government attacks. Some of

the most vicious LRA killings in the Congo occurred after an operation conducted in cooperation with Uganda and the Sudan People's Liberation Army, with US logistical support.

Alston also expressed concern that as elections approach in 2010, Kinshasa and Bas Congo (in the west of the country) are ripe for a repetition of the political killings of hundreds of civilians by committed by security forces from 2006-2008. "The highly repressive state apparatus in these areas was brought home to me dramatically when I was prevented from meeting with witnesses and victims by officials and armed police in Bas Congo earlier this week," said the Rapporteur.

Across the country, impunity for killings is so pervasive that even Bosco Ntaganda, wanted by the ICC for using child soldiers, holds a senior command position in current military operations. "Men dressed anonymously in off-the-rack green military uniforms, lacking any identifying insignia, use brutality and the power of their position to prevail over the law in the Congo," said Alston. "The Government doesn't even know how many soldiers it has. Even a change as simple as requiring soldiers to wear uniforms that identify their name and unit would go a long way to combating impunity".

"Alarm bells are ringing loudly in the DRC," warned Alston, as he called on the Government of the DRC and the international community to take immediate preventative measures to avert further predictable bloodshed in the west, Province Orientale, and the Kivus.

The full text of the Special Rapporteur's statement is available at www.extrajudicialexections.org. For further information, please contact Ms. Sarah Knuckey, Senior Advisor to the Special Rapporteur: sarah.knuckey@nyu.edu.

Professor Alston was appointed UN Special Rapporteur in 2004 and reports to the United Nations Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. He has had extensive experience in the human rights field, including eight years as Chairperson of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, principal legal adviser to UNICEF in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Special Adviser to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. He is Professor of Law and Faculty Director of the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at New York University School of Law. For information on the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, see: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/executions/index.htm>.