With no rebel surrender, UN mission in DR Congo readies military operations

5 January - With the deadline for the unconditional surrender of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) having passed on 2 January, and no significant additional surrenders of FDLR combatants registered since June, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is working to address the situation, a UN spokesperson said today.

He said the Mission would work with regional and international stakeholders including the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), which established the deadline for the FDLR’s surrender, as well as with national partners.

“The Congolese Army will play an essential role in operations against the FDLR. The UN Mission and the Congolese Army have developed a joint military plan for operations against the FDLR,” said UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric at a press briefing in New York.

“Shaping operations have already commenced. MONUSCO has pre-positioned its troops and enablers to support offensive operations against the FDLR in keeping with its mandate,” he added.

Earlier today, MONUSCO chief Martin Kobler updated the Security Council via video-conference on the FDLR and on the general security situation in the country, reporting the arrest of the Force de Résistance Patriotique de l’Ituri (FRPI) leader, Cobra Matata in Déle, on 2 January.

He also pointed to support given by MONUSCO to the Congolese Army during an attack against Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces rebels in North Kivu on 3 January, which killed five rebels and captured two others.

The six-month grace period for the full and unconditional surrender of the FDLR expired Friday. At that time, the UN and its partners urged that “all necessary measures” be taken to disarm the rebels, who have had a “long history of heinous crimes” in the DRC.

In a news release issued Friday, a team of international envoys that included Mr. Kobler and the UN Special Envoy for the
Great Lakes Said Djinnit noted with concern that the FDLR has not met this deadline.

“Instead, the FDLR has used this six-month grace period to continue to commit human rights abuses against innocent people in eastern DRC, recruit combatants, and champion its illegitimate political agenda,” said the news release.

“Ending the threat of the FDLR is not just a DRC responsibility; it is a regional and international responsibility. We all have a deep commitment to ensuring accountability for those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide,” the release continued.

**Mali: UN Mission condemns attack that wounded 8 peacekeepers**

*5 January* - The United Nations stabilization mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has condemned the attack that wounded eight peacekeepers – three seriously – yesterday, in the Gao region.

“The Mission says that a vehicle transporting troops from the Niger contingent struck an explosive device,” UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said as he briefed the press at Headquarters in New York this afternoon.

“Four of the peacekeepers were evacuated to Dakar for further treatment. The others are recovering at a UN facility in Gao,” he said.

The UN is calling on all those involved in the ongoing peace process to prevent such attacks against peacekeepers and to ensure that those responsible for these acts will be brought to justice.

**UN agency calls on global clothing brands to help Cambodian manufacturers absorb wage hike**

*5 January* - With the introduction of a new minimum wage for workers in the garment and footwear industry in Cambodia, United Nations experts have called on global brands that source their products from the country to play a part in helping the industry to absorb the cost increases.

The new minimum wage of $128 per month, which came into effect on 1 January 2015, is projected by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to increase overall average wages in the garment industry – which include bonuses and overtime – from $183 to $217 per month, increasing factories’ wage bills by approximately 18.7 per cent.

“It is important that all sides work together to ensure Cambodia’s garment industry remains economically viable,” said Maurizio Bussi, the ILO’s Country Director for Thailand, Cambodia and Lao PDR. “We call on the global brands to play their part. We have received encouraging signals that key buyers will honour the pledge they gave the Cambodian Government in September.”

The rise comes in the wake of other adjustments since 2012 that have seen the minimum wage increase from $61 per month. At the same time, the prices that Cambodian factories receive in their main markets have been stagnating or declining, with the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics calculating a 4.5 per cent drop in prices paid for apparel imports from Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries since June 2012.

“Caught between these two forces, factories have seen a substantial fall in their operating margins over the past three years,” said Malte Luebker, the ILO’s Senior Regional Wage Specialist. “In principle, factories can respond by increasing efficiency, using measures that range from better work organization to energy conservation. However, our research shows that these gains are gradual and will only enable factories to cover a small share of the expected wage increase.”
For example, optimistic projections of labour productivity growth in the garment sector see room for roughly four per cent growth in 2015, which would enable factories to raise wages by $7, to $190 per month, without eroding their margins. The expected wage increase to $217 per month is far higher than what can be generated through efficiency gains.

To cover the shortfall, and assuming other costs remained the same, the ILO estimates that global brands would need to pay Cambodian factories between 2.4 and three per cent more, adding about two cents to the production costs of t-shirts that can currently be made for 80 cents and that might retail for about $10.

On annual garment and footwear exports worth $6 billion, the small increase could generate additional revenue of $160 million to support the new wage levels.

**'We have no plan B, we have to get rid of this virus' – new head of UN Ebola mission**

3 January - The newly appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, arrived this morning in Accra, Ghana, where he officially begins his duties next week as head of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER).

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed will be taking over for Mr. Anthony Banbury.

Speaking with UNMEER staff at a town hall meeting today, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed praised their achievements but also noted the challenges in battling the deadly outbreak.

“This is a global crisis. We definitely have a difficult time ahead of us, but we can achieve it,” Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed said. “We have no plan B, we have to get rid of this virus. This is within our reach, but we should not be complacent.”

According to the latest World Health Organization (WHO) figures, there are 20,206 confirmed, probable or suspected cases of Ebola and 7,905 reported deaths.

“We need to keep going until we don't have even one case, because even one case is too many,” he said. “The work ahead remains very hard but we really have no other choice.”

Outgoing Head Anthony Banbury welcomed Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, saying, “Even while we face a lot of hard work in the days, weeks and months ahead, it's important to pause and think back to where we were when we started. There were predictions that there would be 1.4 million cases by now.”

Ould Cheikh Ahmed will be visiting Liberia and Sierra Leone next week, then Guinea shortly after, to reinforce UNMEER’s strategic priorities and see first-hand the Ebola response. He will be accompanied by UN Special Envoy on Ebola, Dr. David Nabarro.

According to UNMEER, the three affected countries now have sufficient capacity to isolate and treat 100 percent of confirmed Ebola patients and enough burial teams to ensure safe and dignified burials for 100 percent of all deaths due to Ebola.

Before his new appointment, Ould Cheikh Ahmed served as Deputy Special Representative and Deputy Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).
Burundi: UN Chief welcomes launch of electoral monitoring mission

3 January - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the launch of the United Nations Electoral Observation Mission in Burundi, which officially started its work on 1 January 2015 as mandated by Security Council resolution 2137 (2014).

The UN Electoral Observation Mission (also known by its French acronym MENUB) is headed by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Mr. Cassam Uteem of Mauritius. MENUB is mandated to follow and report on the presidential, parliamentary and local elections in Burundi that are scheduled between May and September 2015.

In a note released by his spokesperson, the Secretary-General noted that "peaceful and credible elections are critical for the people of Burundi". Mr. Ban also said he hoped that all Burundians will seize this opportunity to establish peace and stability in their country.