



**Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on**

**Sexual Violence in Conflict Margot Wallström**

***CONGOLESE WOMEN AGAIN BEAR THE BRUNT OF***

***UNDISCIPLINED SECURITY FORCES***

***(New York, 23 June 2011)***

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I condemn in the strongest possible terms the mass rape of over 150 civilians, mainly women and girls, in the area of Minembwe, South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). These atrocities occurred during a two-day attack, from 10 to 12 June.

This mass rape demonstrates a continuing pattern of ill-discipline on the part of those who bear arms, manifest in acts of pillage committed in conjunction with rape and other human rights abuses. Fuelling this pattern is the rapid integration of former rebel fighters into the national armed forces without vetting or systematic training. When these forces are denied adequate pay or provisions, the risk of looting food and livestock from civilians in the vicinity is greatly heightened. This latest incident provides yet another tragic illustration of the need for security sector reform and oversight in the DRC. It also highlights the immense challenges confronting MONUSCO in terms of ensuring timely access to victims and vulnerable communities.

Primary responsibility rests with the Congolese authorities for investigating this incident, pursuing the perpetrators and bringing them to justice. For our part, the UN is in the process of verifying these incidents and identifying ways to support the survivors. Crimes of this caliber are no accident – they occur pursuant to orders or lax command and control. Commanders, as well as individual perpetrators, must therefore be held accountable. All military forces in the DRC should be aware that earlier this year, a Colonel was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for crimes of sexual violence by his subordinates in Fizi, eastern DRC. Any member of the military who preys upon, rather than protects, the population will likewise face serious consequences.

Highest priority must now be placed on ensuring safe access to services for the survivors and tracking down the perpetrators. With elections on the horizon, no effort must be spared to scale up protection and prevention. Sexual violence in the DRC is destroying lives and livelihoods and impeding the restoration of peace and security.

We continue to monitor this and other incidents of alleged sexual violence in conflict, wherever they occur, and stand in solidarity with the survivors.

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For additional information, please contact:

Letitia Anderson, Office of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict,

at +1 212 963 0910, or Mattias Sundholm at +1 917 628 3531 or [sundholm@un.org](mailto:sundholm@un.org).