

Beat: Health

Zeid calls for immediate halt to Democratic Republic Congo killings

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Paris, Washington DC, Rabat, 20.02.2017, 23:35 Time

USPA NEWS - UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has called on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take immediate steps to halt widespread human rights violations, including apparent summary executions, by the country's armed forces.

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"There are multiple, credible allegations of massive human rights violations in Kasai, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental and Lomami provinces, amid a sharp deterioration in security situation there, including people being targeted by soldiers for their alleged affiliation with a local militia," Zeid said. "It is time to stop a blunt military response that does nothing to tackle the root causes of the conflict between the Government and local militias but instead targets civilians on the basis of their presumed links to the militias," the High Commissioner stressed. "In line with its international human rights obligations, the DRC Government must ensure that its security forces, including the police and the army, respect and protect life and only resort to firearms as a last resort when faced with an imminent threat to life or of serious injury," Zeid said.

A local militia linked to a customary chief, Kamuina Nsapu, who was killed by the DRC armed forces in August 2016 has been increasingly active in Kasai Central Province, mostly attacking government buildings and churches, and national security forces. The militia also reportedly recruits and uses children.

Horrorific video footage emerged over the weekend apparently showing FARDC soldiers shooting repeatedly and without warning at men and women, who purportedly belonged to the Kamuina Nsapu militia, in Muenza Nsapu village. The alleged troops fired at point blank range at unarmed victims as they lay bleeding on the ground. The UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO, is not in a position to verify the origin and authenticity of the video. However, the DRC Government spokesperson and Minister of Communication Lambert Mende has stated that FARDC officers are under judicial investigation for their behavior during recent fighting in the village.

"The DRC authorities must pursue an independent, impartial, prompt, effective and transparent investigation to shed light on what has been happening and to ensure those responsible are held fully to account for what appears to be use of excessive and disproportionate force, and, in some cases, deadly force," the High Commissioner stressed.-----

The UN Joint Human Rights Office (MONUSCO/OHCHR) has been monitoring the Kamuina Nsapu situation closely over several months and has documented a recent flare-up in violence in Kasai Central Province. The Office (UNJHRO) received reports that some 50 people were killed by troops between 6 and 8 February, and a further 101 people were reported killed in confrontations with soldiers between 9 and 13 February. Overall, the UNJHRO has documented the killings of more than 280 individuals since July 2016 in the context of this violence. The UNJHRO is liaising closely with the judicial authorities, including through sharing the findings of the different missions deployed in the area, to ensure that investigations are opened into reported violations by the FARDC and the militias. "The DRC has long been afflicted by serious violence but amid a worrying escalation of violence in provinces considered relatively calm, I call again on the Government to redouble its efforts to tackle impunity that feeds further violence and human rights violations," Zeid said the High Commissioner. "I urge the authorities to put into place a comprehensive peace plan based on dialogue, including finding durable solutions to conflicts with customary chiefs," Zeid said. The High Commissioner called on the Human Rights Council and the international community to monitor the security situation in the DRC, including any progress made by the authorities in investigating, prosecuting and punishing these crimes. Source (OHCHR)

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-10746/zeid-calls-for-immediate-halt-to-democratic-republic-congo-killings.html>

Editorial office and responsibility:

V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDSiV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Rahma Sophia RACHDI

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