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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 August 2007]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Democratic Republic of Congo:

No end to sexual violence against women and children

Increasing violent unrest in eastern DR Congo has sparked a huge increase in the numbers of internally displaced people (IDP) fleeing the fighting and women and children suffering from sexual violence. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warned that at least 640,000 people in North and South Kivu were displaced in June and July 2007. More waves of internally displaced people are arriving at camps in the Kivus on a daily basis. Aid agencies believe a further 280,000 may flee in the next six months. Women and children are the main victims of armed conflicts in eastern DRC.

The brutal war in DRC which left four million people dead since 1996 is supposed to be over but armed groups are still attacking local communities, raping and kidnapping women and children and looting property. UNICEF estimates that hundreds of thousands of women and girls have been raped since the armed conflict began in 1996. But even after the signing of peace treaties in December 2002, there has been no end to sexual violence. In 2005 alone there were more than 40,000 reported rapes or other sexual assaults in DRC. Some 4,500 cases of rape were reported in South Kivu between January and August 2007 – with many more cases believed to have gone unreported. Most victims are too afraid to report the crime, fearing to become stigmatized by their families and other negative social impacts. At the community level, rape victims usually suffer in silence, fearing stigma if their ordeal is made public.

Women are gang-raped, often in front of their families and communities. In numerous cases, male relatives are forced at gun-point to rape their own sisters, daughters or mothers. Many rape victims were tortured or forced to eat human flesh, reported eye witnesses. Some rapists aggravated their crimes by other acts of extraordinary brutality, shooting victims in the vagina or mutilating them with knives or razor blades. Some attacked girls were as young as five years of age or elderly women as old as eighty. Some perpetrators killed their victims outright while others left them to die of their injuries. In addition to the severe psychological impact, sexual violence leaves many survivors with genital lesions, traumatic fistulae and other physical wounds, as well as unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS. However, health infrastructure in the DRC is almost absent. The shortage of medical services is particularly critical given the prevalence of such sexually transmitted diseases among irregular combatants and Congolese soldiers.

In the last decade, all armed groups involved in the conflict in DRC perpetrated sexual violence and used sexual violence as a “weapon of war”. Although in August 2006 a new law in DRC outlawed sexual violence, rape is still committed on a daily basis by the Armed Forces of DRC, the National Congolese Police, and by many non-state armed groups. We welcome the fact that the new law redefines sexual violence, that it increases the penalties and improves the penal procedures. However, the judicial system remains too weak to implement the new law and to establish precedents that might serve as a deterrent against further violence. Impunity still prevails because senior army and

police officers have been shielding their men from prosecution so that only few soldiers were charged with rape.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Council to:

- to strongly denounce crimes of sexual violence in DRC,
- to urge the government of DRC to stop impunity and to implement the new law outlawing sexual violence,
- to call on the international community to provide increased financial, technical and political support for monitoring and documenting sexual violence in DRC and to provide more medical, legal and social support for rape victims,
- to urge the government of DRC and MONUC to ensure a better protection of the civilian population.
