

Statement by Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Crushing levels of violence, displacement fuel unprecedented civilian suffering

30 April 2024

NEW YORK/GENEVA/ROME/WASHINGTON – Escalating conflict is driving record levels of gender-based violence, displacement and hunger in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), threatening to push the country to the brink of catastrophe without urgent international action.

Decades of conflict and the resulting humanitarian emergency have already exhausted and traumatized millions of civilians. In the last few months alone, more than 700,000 people have been forced to flee their homes, bringing the total number of displaced people to an all-time high of 7.2 million.

Ensuring that sufficient aid reaches civilians in need swiftly and without impediment is critical. But this year's Humanitarian Response Plan is woefully underfunded, with just 16 per cent of the \$2.6 billion needed having been received. The gap between rapidly rising needs and sufficient resources means millions of people are left without the lifesaving support they need.

This lack of resources is compounding the crisis by forcing humanitarian organizations to curb their assistance, with women and girls paying a devastatingly high price. Minimal protection and security in crowded displacement camps means many are forced to exchange sex for survival and support for their families. When they venture outside to collect firewood, water or for work, they are also exposed to appalling levels of sexual violence.

Gender-based violence has surged to unprecedented levels, with recorded cases surging between 2022 and 2023. Stigma and the fear of retaliation prevent many survivors from coming forward. In addition to sexual violence, children are also at risk of other threats, including abduction, killing, maiming and recruitment by armed groups.

Perpetrators of human rights violations must be held accountable for their crimes. Under international humanitarian law, civilians must be protected.

More than 25 million people – a quarter of the population – continue to face crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity in the DRC, a country facing one of the world's largest food crises. Cholera and measles are also spreading rapidly as the health sector continues to deteriorate. Climate extremes worsened by El Niño are yet another threat for already struggling families.

Bringing an end to the escalating humanitarian crisis in the DRC requires addressing its root causes: conflict, the exploitation of natural resources, illicit financial flows, prevailing gender inequality and development deficits.

We must step up our support to the Congolese people, including to women and girls who are bearing the brunt of this conflict, as they work to rebuild their lives and livelihoods and return to their homes. The international community must mobilize additional resources for the humanitarian response and support for civil society organizations – as well as the political will to end the violence once and for all.

Signatories:

- Mr. Martin Griffiths, Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
- Ms. Sofia Sprechmann Sineiro, Secretary General, **CARE International**
- Dr. Qu Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization (**FAO**)
- Ms. Nimo Hassan, Chair, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (**ICVA**)
- Mr. Jamie Munn, Executive Director, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (**ICVA**)
- Ms. Amy E. Pope, Director General, International Organization for Migration (**IOM**)
- Mr. Tom Hart, President and Chief Executive Officer, **InterAction**
- Ms. Tjada D'Oyen McKenna, Chief Executive Officer, **Mercy Corps**
- Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (**OHCHR**)
- Ms. Paula Gaviria Betancur, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (**SR on HR of IDPs**)
- Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (**UNDP**)
- Ms. Janti Soeripto, President and Chief Executive Officer, **Save the Children**
- Mr. Michal Mlynár, Executive Director a.i., United Nations Human Settlement Programme (**UN-Habitat**)
- Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (**UNHCR**)
- Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (**UNFPA**)
- Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director, UN Children's Fund (**UNICEF**)
- Ms. Sima Bahous, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, **UN Women**
- Ms. Cindy McCain, Executive Director, World Food Programme (**WFP**)
- Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (**WHO**)
- Mr. Andrew Morley, President and the Chief Executive Officer, **World Vision International**