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PRESS RELEASE PP/No. 02/FEB/09**KASIKI RESETTLEMENT SITE: EMPTY OF RWANDAN REFUGEES**

As stated in our Press Release No1/Feb/09 PP of 7 February 2009 in which we had indicated an imminent operation of certain elements of the FARDC and Rwandan Army (RDF) to forcibly repatriate members of the National Congress for Democracy (NCD), a RUD / RPR coalition, resettled at the site of Kasiki (Lubero, North Kivu) since 31 July 2007.

This has been confirmed by local media including Radio Okapi that reported early today that the site of Kasiki was empty of its occupants. Indeed, according to Radio Okapi, MONUC showed up on site with trucks to repatriate the refugees to Rwanda before finding out that the camp was empty. According to credible reports, the decision to close by all means the Kasiki resettlement site had been taken despite conciliatory statements by certain authorities. Not knowing the destination of the refugees who were forced to leave their little belongings, it is now our duty to ask the Congolese government and MONUC to tell the International Community the fate of these people that included women and children who were supposedly under their protection.

It is strangely unfortunate that when a delegation of refugees was back from making an exploratory visit to Rwanda in order to consider a return on individual and voluntary basis in accordance with international treaties, their forceful removal was decided in order to compel the Rwandan refugees to return to their homeland. We wish to remind the Congolese government and the International Community that, on the basis of the Kisangani Process, it was agreed that the Rwandan refugees who would opt not to return to Rwanda would be relocated to places to be mutually agreed upon. It is also regrettable that during the six months that these refugees came to pass in Kasiki, neither UNHCR nor the ICRC showed little concern in their fate.

Our organization strongly condemns any attempt to forcefully repatriate refugees since such an operation would only result in massive loss of innocent lives among both refugees and local populations. Indeed, this use of force is reminiscent of the manhunt that engulfed the region in 1996-1997 in which several hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees were massacred in cold blood and with impunity by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) and its allies not to mention the many victims among the Congolese population. The perpetrators of these massacres which have been described as acts of genocide by the United Nations are well known and occupy senior positions in

the political and military regime in Kigali.

Our organization is convinced that the lasting solution to the problem of Rwandan refugees is only through Dialogue. It is for this reason that the NCD members invested themselves in good faith in the Kisangani Process. Although this operation would have resulted in immediate political gains for some, it will, however be difficult to reach a peaceful and lasting solution to the problem of refugees in the region.

Thus, as has been mentioned during the evaluation meeting which has just been held in Rome under the auspices of the Sant'Egidio Community and other international observers, our organization reiterates the request made to the United Nations Secretary General to appoint as soon as possible a Special Envoy specifically mandated to find a lasting solution to the problem of Rwandan refugees established in the DRC and the region. In addition, as agreed with the Congolese government in those proceedings that, the persons who were at the Kasiki resettlement site should be granted refugee status and that the Kasiki site and its surroundings be declared a zone of peace and be considered as such.

Our organization remains ready to pursue any avenue that respects the rights of Rwandan refugees wherever they are. It launches a solemn appeal to the Kigali regime to begin a Dialogue with its opposition to find a lasting solution to Rwandan political problems that constitute the main source of recurring instability in the region.

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SPOKESPERSON