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## For Immediate Release

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## DR Congo: Scores Killed in New Ethnic Fighting

### *Prompt UN Action Urged in Ugandan-Occupied Areas*

(New York, February 13, 2002) -- Uganda should be held responsible for grave human rights violations taking place in territories it occupies in northeastern Congo, Human Rights Watch said today. A resurgence of ethnic fighting there has claimed scores of lives over the last few weeks and displaced at least fifteen thousand people. The dispute, rooted in conflict over land, flared in an area that is contested by three Congolese rebel factions and effectively governed by none of them.

The United Nations Security Council will be discussing the Secretary General's report on the deteriorating security environment in the D.R. Congo in the coming week. Human Rights Watch urges the Security Council to address the government of Uganda as an important agent of unrest in the eastern part in the country, and to hold it liable for the grave rights violations and massive human suffering taking place in territories under its occupation.

The United Nations peacekeeping force in Congo (MONUC) should also exert maximum pressure on local contenders to cease fighting and should send additional military, humanitarian, and human rights monitors to the area.

Uganda has occupied the area militarily since 1998 and has supported all three rival groups with arms, training, and political backing. Under the terms of the 1999 Lusaka Peace Accords, Uganda has withdrawn some troops from the Congo but maintained or redeployed others in the area.

"Uganda wants to keep enough control to continue getting rich from the Congo, but doesn't want to take responsibility for protecting civilians," said Alison Des Forges, senior advisor for the Great Lakes region at Human Rights Watch. Ituri district is rich in timber, gold and diamonds, among other resources.

On February 4, four suspected supporters of the Lendu were killed in Bunia, capital of Ituri district, in the latest of a series of ethnic clashes that cost more than a hundred lives and displaced at least fifteen thousand persons in recent weeks.

With ethnic clashes increasing, Uganda pulled troops back to Bunia from elsewhere in Ituri instead of using them to contain the violence. Ugandan authorities were prepared to defend the town and to prevent the conflict from spilling over into Uganda itself. According to local sources, the Ugandan army in mid January deployed hundreds of soldiers in the border towns of Aru, Mahagi, and at Ariwara.

On February 1, Ugandan Defense Minister Amama Mbabazi remarked that the situation in Bunia was explosive and called on the UN to send troops to take control of the area.

“Uganda can’t foist responsibility on the UN for restoring order from the chaos it has fostered,” said Des Forges. “As the occupying power, under international law it must protect civilians and stop these killings.”

For further information and analysis, the background paper “Attacks on Civilians in Ugandan Occupied Areas in Northeastern Congo” is available at <http://www.hrw.org/background/africa/bunia0213bkg.htm>.