



Press Statement

London, 29 January 2007

ICC trial will go ahead, but limited charges may alienate victims in Eastern Congo

Today the International Criminal Court (ICC) confirmed charges against Thomas Lubanga, allowing the ICC's first trial to go ahead. The ICC was established in 2002, and now it is about to start its first trial. While REDRESS is pleased that the case is finally going ahead, it is disappointing that the charges are very limited. Only one crime has been brought against Lubanga, head of the UPC, namely, the recruitment and use of children under 15 in the conflict.

“Prosecuting child recruitment is important, but the charges must be put into context or they may fuel local antagonisms as the majority of victims have been excluded,” says Mariana Goetz, author of the Report “Victims, Perpetrators or Heroes? Child Soldiers before the International Criminal Court”.

People in Eastern Congo are pleased that the case is finally going ahead, but they do not understand this singular focus and they are disappointed. For them the ICC is remote, foreign and increasingly irrelevant. The protracted conflict claimed thousands upon thousands of lives. Women and girls were raped systematically. Homes were pillaged and burned, people were tortured and thousands have fled and are now living in displacement camps.

REDRESS had hoped that today's decision would confirm the child soldier charges, but would also ask the Prosecutor to investigate more crimes such as killings, rape and torture.

“Another forgotten aspect that is the issue of the girl child. Girls were used as sex slaves in addition to being soldiers directly involved in combat. Yet the charges include no crimes of sexual violence,” explains Bukeni Beck Wazuri, researcher for the REDRESS report, and Director of AJEDI-Ka, an NGO working with children associated with armed conflict..

The International Criminal Court is mandated to contribute to ending impunity and promoting peace and reconciliation. **Instead, the limited charges in this first case may deepen cleavages amongst rival factions in Eastern Congo and alienate victim populations.** The lack of recognition of some of the most heinous and flagrant crimes denies victims their right to justice and reparation.

REDRESS, the international NGO that promotes victims' rights has been campaigning for the rights of victims to be at the forefront and mandate of the ICC since well before the Rome Statute was adopted in 1998.

For further information contact:

Mariana Goetz, ICC Programme Adviser mariana@redress.org <http://www.redress.org>

REDRESS : +44-20-7793 1777

Link to report: <http://www.redress.org/publications/childsoldiers>