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AFRICA/CONGO DR - UN reports 500 rapes in Kivu in 1 month; a missionary comments

Kinshasa (Agenzia Fides) – “The UN has finally become aware of a situation that we as missionaries and as the Church have been denouncing for some time now. However, I often wonder whether there are strategic and political interests in publishing this report right now," Fides has been told by a missionary from Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu (eastern DRC), commenting on the report made to the UN Security Council by Atul Khare (under-secretary in charge of the UN peacekeeping missions). Khare noted that between July and August, 500 people have suffered sexual violence in North and South Kivu. Most of the violence was committed by the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR, a Rwandan Hutu rebel group) and the Mai-Mai, a Congolese militia that fights against the foreign presence in Kivu. The UN Stabilization Mission in Congo (MONUSCO) that is unable to prevent these crimes has been in the area for awhile. "Our actions were not sufficient and have led to unacceptable brutality towards the population of villages in the area. Our actions were insufficient, and the consequences have been unacceptable acts of brutality committed against the people of the region. We should be doing a better job," admitted Khare.
"I just wonder why the UN is denouncing this situation at this time. I also see that the UN report especially denounces the violence of the FDLR and the Mai-Mai, but not those committed by other armed groups in the area, including the UN peacekeepers themselves," says the missionary, who for security reasons does not wish to be named. "I do not know if there is a relationship between this sudden awakening of the UN in denouncing the humanitarian situation and the ongoing debate that has taken place for months over the withdrawal of the UN mission in Congo, which is not very well seen by the local population and is regarded as a front for foreign interests. However, it is true that the South Kivu MPs themselves have asked the UN not to withdraw troops immediately as it would lose the only, albeit inefficient, bulwark against the worst violence."
"I would add that the operation “Amani Leo” continues. It followed Kimia II, which was conducted in Kivu against the FDLR, of which we know little, but who cause suffering to the civilian population," concludes the source of Fides. The violence against civilians by Congolese soldiers has been condemned by the same commander of Operation “Amani Leo,” Colonel Delphin Kahimbi, who on September 2 in Bukavu warned his men of strict disciplinary measures against soldiers who commit violence against the population.
On August 30, after the first news on the spread of violence in Kivu, Archbishop Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, Archbishop of Kinshasa, declared that he was "shocked and disgusted" by these "inhuman acts" and called for national authorities to take effective measures to prevent further violence and bring perpetrators to justice. (LM)
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