

## D.R. CONGO: HUMANITARIAN CONCERN FOR THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE CAUGHT IN CLASHES IN KITCHANGA

(Goma, 7 March 2013): Tens of thousands of people, including internally displaced persons, are caught in clashes since late February between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) and the armed group the Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS) in the town of Kitchanga and its surroundings in North Kivu.

The fighting has already caused tens of civilian deaths, including a humanitarian worker, wounded hundreds and pushed thousands of people to flee their homes, of which more than 5,000 have sought refuge around the UN peacekeeping base in Kitchanga. Humanitarian assistance has not been spared by the violence: warehouses have been burned down, medical facilities destroyed and the city's water supply system has been affected.

“Three months after the events of this past November, I'm very concerned that thousands of lives are again endangered. I'm particularly worried about the increase and deepening of ethnic violence and reports of arbitrary arrests. The parties to the conflict have to avoid civilian casualties at all cost, respect the civilian character of internally displaced settlements and ensure that humanitarian actors can provide much needed assistance,” stated Moustapha Soumaré, the Humanitarian Coordinator in DRC today.

Humanitarian agencies are braving a very volatile security situation to deliver aid and assess needs. However, the continuing fighting is hindering nearly all humanitarian missions from more effectively responding to urgent needs, notably the protection of civilians. The humanitarian community demands unimpeded and complete access and calls on all parties to the conflict, in particular the Congolese authorities, to actively engage in the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers.

North Kivu hosts more than 799,000 internally displaced people, representing one third of the displaced population in DRC, estimated at 2.6 million on 31 January 2013. Since the attacks that culminated in the temporary occupation of Goma in November 2012, humanitarian agencies have tried to mobilize the necessary resources to assist hundreds of thousands of people still displaced and returning home. The current deterioration of the security and displacement situation risks compounding funding gaps and exposing even more people to increasingly precarious living conditions.

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