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**Closure of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps around
Kalemie, DR Congo, may lead to resumption of genocidal activities
against indigenous Batwa peoples**

Initiative for Equality (IfE), a global network of organizations addressing inequalities, is urgently calling on the agencies of the United Nations, the international community, the national government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the provincial government of Tanganyika Province, DRC, and any other involved entities to exert all due caution before closure of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps around Kalemie, DRC.

According to Dr. Deborah S. Rogers, President of IfE, the provincial government of Tanganyika Province has announced that the camps around Kalemie will be closed,¹ despite the fact that the underlying causes of the conflict leading to the mass displacement have not been resolved. On August 22 Minister of the Interior for Tanganyika Province, Dieudonné Kamona, announced the closures of IDP camps around the province's capitol city of Kalemie, to begin on August 26.

Although officials said that any returns would be "voluntary", Rogers said that if the camps are closed down, "indigenous Batwa people who attempt to return home may be subject to a resumption of genocidal attacks."

The IfE network released a report in April 2019, documenting widespread massacres and mass rapes committed against the indigenous Batwa people in the Province of Tanganyika, DRC.² The report includes results of a January 2019 investigation into atrocities against the indigenous group during 2016 - 2018, documenting well over 1,000 killings and 2,000 rapes, and concluding that war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed. These events led many on both sides of the conflict to flee to the IDP camps around Kalemie, in fear for their lives. The report can be accessed in English or French (see links below).

"Of course the Batwa people will want to return home if offered the chance, after years of displacement," Rogers said, "but because there has been complete impunity for those who committed the atrocities, there is every reason to believe that the attacks will resume when the Batwa community members arrive to reclaim their lands and homes."

"In fact," she added, "there will be an incentive for those who took their lands to use force to prevent the Batwa from reclaiming lands." She said the situation was somewhat similar to that of the Rohingya refugees who fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh, and are fearful to return home without any guarantees that the situation has changed.

The indigenous Batwa people, the most ancient inhabitants of this region of Africa, have been the subject of severe discrimination, land grabs, rights violations, sexual violence and killings across DRC for many decades. The Batwa (also known as Twa, Mbuti, Bambuti, and Pygmies) are targeted for several reasons, including the fact that they hold traditional indigenous land rights under international law.³ These lands are coveted by other ethnic groups and economic actors for their minerals and timber. The Katanga region (of which Tanganyika Province is a part) is well-known for its mineral wealth, particularly copper and cobalt, with various factions vying for control of resources in this region since at least the early 1960s.⁴

Other reasons given for the inter-ethnic conflict, discussed at length in the IfE report, include land grabs by neighboring non-indigenous communities, as well as long-standing discrimination

against and exploitation of the indigenous Batwa. The report notes that regardless of the original reasons for the conflict, a cycle of fear and revenge is now being perpetuated by lack of access to security and legal justice in conflict-torn eastern DRC.

Roberto Guimarães, Chairman of the Board of Directors of IfE, said the network is calling on the national government of DRC, the provincial government of Tanganyika Province, UN agencies and the broader international community to adhere to all the mandates governing those responsible for protecting Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).^{5, 6, 7, 8, 9} These mandates emphasize the need to provide protection to IDPs; to include IDPs in the planning and implementation of actions and decisions that affect them; to especially protect against the displacement of indigenous peoples and other groups with a special dependency on their lands; to protect IDPs against acts of genocide; and to protect IDPs against forcible return to any place where their life, safety, liberty or health would be at risk.

According to Guimarães, the IfE network is calling on the UNHCR, OCHA, UNICEF, the African Union, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Special Rapporteur for the Rights of IDPs, the Special Rapporteur for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and any other involved entities, "to ensure that that people are not required to leave the IDP camps until arrangements have been made to ensure –

- their protection and safety, especially against a resumption of reprisals,
- their ability to safely reestablish access to their lands and homes,
- their reintegration into their home communities,
- the implementation of mechanisms for securing victims and witnesses during trials,
- the development of a plan for just compensation for the victims of these attacks, and
- a meaningful peace process at the local level, which encourages the various ethnic communities to find ways to resolve disputes and coexist peacefully."

"In addition, we call for the prosecution of the perpetrators of these atrocities," Rogers added.

"This is needed in order to end the ongoing cycle of fear, killings and subsequent revenge that

flourish when impunity causes people to feel that they have no option but to take the law into their own hands," she said.

The African Union has declared 2019 as the year of “refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons” and has convened a series of consultations to discuss root causes, lasting solutions, and the capacity of governments to address displacement.⁸ Rogers and Guimarães noted that Africa remains the only region in the world to have concluded a binding instrument addressing internal displacement (the 2009 Kampala Convention¹⁰).

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LINKS TO INFORMATION:

¹ Article announcing intent to close the IDP camps around Kalemie, DRC:

https://www.radiookapi.net/2019/08/22/actualite/societe/kalemie-le-gouvernement-provincial-annonce-la-fermeture-des-sites-des?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+radiookapi%2Ffeed+%28Radio+Okapi%29

² Initiative for Equality: Report on atrocities against Batwa people in Tanganyika Province, DRC:

EN - [OFF THE RECORD Apr 2019 EN](#)

FR - [UNE SITUATION IGNORÉE Apr 2019 FR](#)

³ UN DESA: Declaration on land rights of indigenous peoples:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

⁴Conflicts in Katanga region: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/katanga-tensions-drcs-mineral-heartland>

⁵ UN OCHA: Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998): <http://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/199808-training-OCHA-guiding-principles-Eng2.pdf>

⁶ UN General Assembly: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (2017): <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IDPersons/A-72-202.pdf>

⁷ UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs, UNHCR and OCHA: Plan of Action for Advancing Prevention, Protection and Solutions for IDPs (2018): <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180523-gp20-plan-of-action-final.pdf>

⁸ UN General Assembly, UNHCR: Note on International Protection (2019): <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/5d5fcc694>

⁹ UN General Assembly: Protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons (2017): https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/ga_resol_idps_2017.pdf

¹⁰ African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) (2009)

EN - [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36846-treaty-0039 -
_kampala_convention_african_union_convention_for_the_protection_and_assistance_of_internally_displaced_persons_in_africa_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36846-treaty-0039_-_kampala_convention_african_union_convention_for_the_protection_and_assistance_of_internally_displaced_persons_in_africa_e.pdf)

FR - [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36846-treaty-0039 -
_kampala_convention_african_union_convention_for_the_protection_and_assistance_of_internally_displaced_persons_in_africa_f.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36846-treaty-0039_-_kampala_convention_african_union_convention_for_the_protection_and_assistance_of_internally_displaced_persons_in_africa_f.pdf)