

New York, USA, December 9 (Infosplusgabon) - At least 15 United Nations 'blue helmets' in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been killed and many more injured, in what the Secretary-General António Guterres described on Friday as the "worst attack" on UN peacekeepers in recent history.

Late on Thursday, a MONUSCO (the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC) Company Operating Base at Semuliki in Beni territory, North Kivu, was attacked by suspected Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) elements, resulting in a protracted fighting between the suspected armed group elements and MONUSCO and Armed Forces of the DRC, known by the French acronym, FARDC.

"These deliberate attacks against UN peacekeepers are unacceptable and constitute a war crime" said Secretary-General António Guterres, adding: "I condemn this attack unequivocally."

Further, calling on the DRC authorities to investigate the incident and swiftly bring the perpetrators to justice, the UN chief stressed: "There must be no impunity for such assaults, here or anywhere else."

A UN statement said in his remarks, the UN chief also described the attack as another indication of the challenges faced by UN peacekeeping operations around the world and

acknowledged the sacrifices made by troop contributing countries in the service of global peace.

“These brave women and men are putting their lives on the line every day across the world to serve peace and to protect civilians,” he noted, offering condolences to the families and loved ones of those killed and a speedy recovery to those injured.

All of the peacekeeping troops killed in the brutal attack which reportedly lasted some three hours were from Tanzania. In addition, three members of the contingent are reported to be missing in action.

According to Ian Sinclair, the Director of the UN Operations and Crisis Centre (UNOCC), initial figures indicate that 53 peacekeepers have been injured, of whom three critically, but the numbers could rise.

Members of the FARDC have also been killed and injured in the attack but numbers are yet to be confirmed, Mr. Sinclair told reporters at a news briefing at the UN Headquarters, in New York.

“Our reinforcements have arrived on the scene and a search is ongoing for the missing soldiers,” he said, noting that the wounded have been evacuated from the area, among whom some have been further evacuated to more advanced medical facilities in Goma, DRC.

“Further medical evacuation is possible for seriously injured,” he added.

Also Friday, in a strongly worded statement, the UN Security Council condemned the attack.

“There can be no impunity for such acts,” stressed the 15-member Council, calling upon the Government of the DRC to ensure that the perpetrators of such attacks are swiftly brought to justice.

In the statement, the Security Council also reiterated their full support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the DRC and to MONUSCO to fully implement their mandate.

Over a dozen UN peacekeepers killed in DRC

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The volatile North Kivu region, located in eastern DRC, has witnessed a number of attacks on UN peacekeeping forces. In October, two UN 'blue helmets' were killed and another 18 were injured their base was attacked by the ADF armed group.

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