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## Life saving emergency assistance underway in Ituri

*Bunia, 8 February* – Humanitarian organisations have begun the delivery of much-needed emergency assistance to the survivors of an attack on Tché, District of Ituri. Over 10,000 people are now gathered in the area, seeking protection from further attacks by FNI militia.

“Life saving emergency assistance is underway in Tché” confirmed Ross Mountain, United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for DRC. “Food and other essential items such as blankets, cooking equipment, soap and clothes have been distributed to the vulnerable population congregating in the area by humanitarian organisations”. MONUC forces have also provided potable water to those gathered in Tché.

Humanitarian organisations reacted almost immediately to this emergency, one of a growing number of crisis situations developing across Ituri District since the beginning of the year. The swift response to these emergencies was in part made possible by the joint UNICEF and OCHA managed Rapid Response Fund, which provided the non-food items for distribution, as well as funding intervening partner operations.

“Continuing insecurity in the Territory of Djugu is likely to provoke more displacements in the near future” said Mr Mountain. “I am increasingly concerned for the plight of the people of Ituri. Over 40,000 people have been forced to flee their homes in the area since the beginning of the year, and are now surviving in increasingly difficult circumstances. We have a humanitarian crisis brewing.”

Humanitarians are providing life-saving assistance but want to avoid the establishment of a camp in the area around Tché, which is currently being secured by MONUC. “People are naturally seeking the security of a camp”, said the UN Humanitarian Coordinator. “However our first priority must be to help them return home as quickly as the security situation allows, providing them with the humanitarian assistance necessary for them to restart their shattered lives”, he continued.

Elsewhere in the Territory of Djugu, over 25,000 people have been displaced towards the towns of Kasenyi and Tchomia on the shorefront of Lake Albert, following hostilities in the Nyamamba area that began at the end of December. Further north, an estimated 14,000 people are seeking refuge in the town of Kafe. Other families have fled to Muhito, just 15km north of Bunia, where over 5,000 displaced, mainly women and children, are now seeking shelter. Humanitarian assistance to the displaced populations in all these areas is already underway.

Over 50,000 people have died since hostilities between Lendu and Hema groups erupted into violence in the District of Ituri in 1999.

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