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### News note

## UNICEF demands unconditional release of 90 abducted school children in northeastern DRC

BUNIA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, 22 September 2008 - According to local authorities ninety children were kidnapped by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Dungu territory, Orientale Province on Wednesday, September 17, 2008. During simultaneous attacks on the Kiliwa, Duru, and Nambia villages the LRA took fifty children from a primary school in Kiliwa and forty others from a secondary school in Duru. The children are presumed to have been taken to nearby LRA bases in the forest.

"UNICEF demands the unconditional release of the abducted children," stated Julien Harneis UNICEF eastern DRC's Chief of Field Operations. "These children were taken from their schools; UNICEF is very concerned that they will now be forced to fight or support fighting, putting their lives at risk."

In addition to the child abductions, a village chief and two Italian missionaries were taken, at least three civilians killed, health centers have been looted, and houses burnt. In Kiliwa, the entire village except for the health center was burnt to the ground. The population has fled and as of this morning has started arriving in Dungu town.

UNICEF is coordinating with humanitarian actors for an emergency response.

UNICEF calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all children by the LRA and for all actors to ensure the protection of children and women. UNICEF reminds all parties that the abduction and use of children in armed groups is a war crime and crime against humanity.

#### About UNICEF DRC

UNICEF has mounted one of its largest emergency humanitarian operations in the world in the DRC. UNICEF and its network of operational partners continues responding to the needs of internally displaced persons, returnees, and host communities with programs in health, nutrition, education, child protection, essential household items, and water, sanitation and hygiene. In order to respect the fundamental rights of Congolese children to survive and realize their potential, UNICEF advocates for sustainable peace and stability in the eastern DRC.

#### About UNICEF

UNICEF is present in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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