



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### CONGO'S WILDLIFE RANGERS LAUNCH OFFENSIVE AGAINST ARMED GROUPS TRAFFICKING CHARCOAL IN GORILLA PARK

**The Congolese National Park Authorities have sent the biggest ever deployment of armed rangers to strike at charcoal-making operations run by armed groups deep in the forests of Virunga National Park in Eastern DR Congo. The move, undertaken in collaboration with the UN peace-keeping forces MONUC, follows a report by the United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo identifying charcoal from Virunga National Park as a major source of revenue for illegal armed groups. These include the FDLR, the Rwandan militia whose members are held responsible for the Rwandan Genocide in 1994.**

Five specially-trained platoons of 30 Rangers have been conducting dawn raids in the forests on the flanks of the Virunga volcanoes. In the past week 252 charcoal kilns have been destroyed, at an estimated commercial value of \$US 378,000 and 57 arrests made, including a militia officer. The rangers have engaged in 3 armed contacts with the FDLR and 3 rangers have so far been evacuated with gunshot injuries. On the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> July a patrol post was partially burned down during a retaliatory attack by the FDLR.



*Ranger on guard in front of a charcoal kiln.*

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**“The goal of this offensive is to inflict maximum possible damage to the trafficking of illegal charcoal, estimated at over US\$ 30 million a year, much of which is benefiting the militias” said park director Emmanuel de Merode. “The trafficking of natural resources such as charcoal is an underlying cause of instability in Eastern Congo. This operation is a first step towards re-establishing the rule of law, a condition for bringing peace to the region.”**

The park authorities with support from the European Union and other donors have also launched a major initiative to provide energy alternatives to charcoal for the local population. These include the local production of combustible briquettes produced from grass, leaves and agricultural waste, as well as establishing plantation forest. The program is on track to create 34,000 employments in briquette production and provide a viable substitute to charcoal by 2011.



*Rangers pass through area of forest destroyed by charcoal makers.  
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#### **Editor’s Notes:**

The **Congolese Wildlife Authority (ICCN)** and its Rangers work throughout the country to protect the National Parks of Congo and their wildlife from poachers, rebel groups, illegal miners and land invasions. Over 150 Rangers have been killed in the last 10 years protecting the 5 parks of eastern DRC. See [www.gorilla.cd](http://www.gorilla.cd) for more information.

**Virunga National Park**, Africa’s oldest national park (established in 1925) and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979, is home to 200 of the world’s last remaining mountain gorillas and a small population of eastern lowland gorillas. Formerly known as Albert National Park, Virunga lies in eastern DR Congo and covers 7,800 square kilometers. The park is managed by the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature, the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN). See [www.gorilla.cd](http://www.gorilla.cd) for more information.



*Rangers consulting operational maps.  
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**FDLR**, or the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda is the primary Rwandan Hutu Power rebel group that continues to operate mostly within the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and is composed almost entirely of ethnic Hutus opposed to Tutsi rule and influence in the region. The group formed in 2000 following the merger of various Rwandan armed groups including the Interahamwe militias responsible for the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. The FDLR is blamed for many of the recent atrocities against civilians in the Congolese Provinces of North and South Kivu.

**MONUC** is the United Nations Peace Keeping Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo and is the largest such mission in the World, with over 20,000 staff, including 16,626 troops, primarily based in the east of the country. See [www.monuc.unmissions.org](http://www.monuc.unmissions.org) for more information.

**The United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo** was established under paragraph 18 of Security Council resolution 1807 (2008) to gather and analyse all relevant information on flows of arms as well as networks operating in violation of the the arms embargo in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their report can be found [here](#).

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