**In Congo, 154 Rapes 30 KM from UN Peacekeepers Leaves UN Silent, P-5 In Disarray**

By Matthew Russell Lee

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UNITED NATIONS, August 23 -- Thirty kilometers from a UN peacekeeping base in Eastern Congo, at least 154 women were gang raped over the course of days without the UN doing anything about it. The UN Mission, MONUSCO, costs $1 billion a year, and is charged with protecting civilians.

At the UN's noon briefing on August 23, spokesman Martin Nesirky read out a number of press releases and then asked if there were any questions. Inner City Press asked about the gang rapes, attributed by the UN to the FDLR rebels, and asked why the UN had done nothing. Video here, from Minute 3:12.

Spokesman Nesirky replied that thirty kilometers might sound close by, but this is a “densely wooded area” and that the FDLR has “blocked the road.”

Nesirky answered these and other follow up question be reading from a prepared statement he pulled out of a binder in front of him, saying “it says here.” Video here, at Minute 12.

Inner City Press asked Nesirky why, if he had this statement, he had not read it out at the beginning of the briefing, but rather waited to see if a question would be asked. Video here, from Minute 21:38. This is important, in light of statements Nesirky has made about his asserted right to block questions, that there are no rules, that it is “his briefing.”

Nesirky nevertheless told Inner City Press that he didn't read out the Congo statement because he knew questions would be asked, “if not by you then by someone else.” The statement is true of many of the statements that Nesirky does read out at the beginning of “his” briefings.

Could it be that the UN knows that the gang rape of 154 women 30 kilometers from its facilities makes the UN look bad? What will be done to improve MONUSCO's and the UN's performance on protection of civilians?

And where, one wondered, is the UN's new -- for months -- Special Representative to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on sexual violence and conflict, Margot Wallstrom? This is a test case.

In front of the Security Council, Inner City Press asked this month's Council president Vitaly Churkin of Russia if the Council would take up the issue of the gang rape of 154 women in a country with a $1 billion UN peacekeeping mission. Videohere, from Minute 3:49.

Ambassador Churkin said it was very disturbing but “we have not yet consulted on whether we need to do something about it.” Inner City Press asked the spokespeople of two of the Western Permanent Five members of the Council if they intended to ask for a meeting or at least Press Statement -- that intention does not appear to be there.

By contrast, when French UN peacekeepers in South Lebanon had eggs thrown at them, the Council had an emergency meeting and issued a press statement. Watch this site.

Footnotes: Inner City Press also asked Nesirky if the UN was ready, belatedly, to say which rebel group was responsible for the killing of Indian peacekeepers last week. Video here, from Minute 18:33. (Note that the audio of the August 23 UN noon briefing was mixed with ambient sound, seemingly from the stakeout area in front of the Security Council.)

No, Nesirky said, adding that since the incident involved UN peacekeepers, there is a different procedure than for the gang rape of 154 women, which the UN has attributed to the FDLR. In fact, the Congolese government has already made arrests in the case of the killing of the UN peacekeepers by rebels who did not have guns. So why won't the UN speak about who did it?