Mass rape of more than 120 women by armed militia in east Congo, says aid group

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By AP

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Members of an armed militia raped women en masse in Congo earlier this month after attacking and looting an eastern town, the Doctors Without Borders charity group said Thursday.

The group said it had treated 127 rape victims between the ages of 14 to 70 who came forward after a May 1 attack on the town of Kikamba in South Kivu province.

The victims said they were raped the next morning as about 60 armed men looted homes, assaulted men and women and forced 30 children to help them load up stolen goods.

“Many victims came forward very quickly, looking for medical assistance,” said Francisco Otero, head of the aid group’s mission in South Kivu. “This is not the norm, as victims usually don’t report this type of aggression for fear of retaliation by armed groups or rejection by their own community.”
In addition, two victims were treated for gunshot wounds, the group said. Rape has long been used as a brutal weapon of war in eastern Congo, which has been mired in conflict for more than two decades.

The Congolese military itself has been notorious for violent sexual crimes, and Congolese army commanders signed a declaration in March to combat rape in war.

In a report last month, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed “grave concern” over the sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups in 19 different countries, including Congo.

Congo’s government has prosecuted high-ranking officers for sexual violence and is paying reparations to survivors but the UN said the central African nation saw a resurgence in 2014 of violence by armed groups, including an increase in rapes.