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Human Rights Watch Calls for Rwanda to Arrest Congolese War Crimes Suspect

by Kim Lewis

Human Rights Watch is calling for Rwandan military officials to stop arming and supporting a Congolese war crimes suspect, and arrest him.

The organization says it has evidence, including eye-witness accounts, that Congolese General Bosco Ntaganda is receiving weapons, ammunition and recruits from Rwanda's military to support his mutiny in the Rutshuru territory of eastern DRC. He is wanted by the International Criminal Court for recruiting and using child soldiers. Ntaganda and the Rwandan government both deny any involvement in mutinous activities.

"What we found is that Rwanda military officials have allowed Ntaganda to enter Rwanda territory. We've spoken to numerous witnesses who escorted Bosco to the border with Rwanda," said Ida Sawyer, Congo researcher and advocate for Human Rights Watch in Goma, DRC.

Ntaganda was also allegedly seen with Rwandan military officials and participated in meetings to help recruit civilians to help with the mutiny.

Human Rights Watch said Rwanda supported rebel groups in eastern Congo in the past including the CNDP, National Congress for the Defense of the People. It said the rebels were made up largely of Congolese Tutsi rebel groups that operated in North Kivu in 2007 to 2008. At the time, they said Rwanda provided recruits and weapons similar to what they are doing now.

They said Ntaganda was a part of that movement and at that time received support from Rwanda.

In 2009, Ntaganda became leader of the CNDP, and has been commanding operations in eastern Congo ever since.

"So now we and others have called for Ntaganda's arrest and Rwanda has not supported this," said Sawyer. She said an estimated 300-600 troops presently support Ntaganda.

"That includes former Congolese army soldiers, many of whom used to be a part of the CNDP rebellion. It also includes Congolese boys and young men who have been recruited [by force] in the last couple of months," she said. Sawyer added that up to 300 young men forced to join the rebellion are Rwandan.