

UN High Commissioner for Refugees will go to New York next week

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GENEVA, Sept 5 (AFP) - UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sakado Ogata will go to New York next week to urge the UN Security Council to act to solve the growing refugee crisis in the former Zaire, the UNHCR said Friday.

The UNHCR is examining its options after the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) threw out over 700 Rwandan and Burundi refugees on Thursday, the latest in a long series of serious human rights abuses in the Great Lakes region, spokeswoman Pamela O'Toole said.

"This is not the first time, (which is why) the High Commissioner is so furious," she said.

Over the last month, the DRC and Gabon have sent hundreds of refugees back to Rwanda, more than 100 DRC refugees in a camp in Rwanda were hacked to death with machetes and soldiers of Rwanda's former Hutu army blocked refugees re-

turning from the Central African Republic, O'Toole added.

Ogata will address the Security Council on Tuesday, a visit that was already arranged before this latest crisis. She is in constant contact with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and is still trying to convene an extraordinary meeting of the Organisation of African Unity.

"There is a great need for an intensive focus on what is an absolutely appalling situation for refugees across the Great Lakes region," in eastern DRC, O'Toole said.

She was particularly critical of the DRC army's "outrageous expulsion" of 779 Rwandan and Burundi refugees from a camp near the northeastern city of Kisangani on Thursday.

Most of the refugees were women and children and many were traumatised by the atrocities they have witnessed, she said..

Among the most serious human

rights violations in the former Zaire are attacks on camps and a continuing campaign to butcher refugees, attacks on members of humanitarian organisations and the DRC government's refusal to give the organisations unlimited access to refugees.

Some 2,500 Rwandan and Burundi refugees were in camps in the former Zaire before the latest expulsions and another 20,000 were known to be scattered throughout the country.

The UNHCR estimates that a total of 200,000 refugees remain unaccounted for since rebel forces, led by former rebel leader and current DRC President Laurent Kabila, marched through the country on a seven-month campaign to overthrow Zaire's longtime dictator Mobutu Sese Seko.

O'Toole refused to say whether there was a connection between the expulsion of refugees from Kisangani

and obstacles facing a separate UN mission investigating the presumed massacre of thousands of Hutu refugees by Kabila's troops during the civil war.

Some refugees survived the atrocities.

The UN mission has been blocked in Kinshasa since they arrived nearly two weeks ago. Annan must now decide what action to take in the face of resistance from the DRC government.

The UNHCR has demanded unlimited, permanent access to the refugees and an end to forced repatriations.

The UN body is studying several options in the face of the current crisis. Withdrawing from the country would have serious consequences for the refugees who need international aid, O'Toole said.

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