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## **War Crime Charge for Congo Rebel**

The leader of a Democratic Republic of Congo militia has become the first war crimes suspect to be charged at the International Criminal Court.

Thomas Lubanga, who led the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) militia group based in eastern DR Congo, is accused of recruiting child soldiers.

International human rights groups argue that charges of murder, torture and rape should be brought against him.

The ICC was set up in 2002 to deal with war crimes and genocide worldwide.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other international watchdog bodies welcomed the charges, but said they did not go far enough.

"Enlisting, conscripting and using children as soldiers in armed conflict are serious crimes that should be condemned and appropriately punished. However, much more is needed," HRW said in a statement addressed to the International Criminal Court last month.

"We believe that you, as the prosecutor, must send a clear signal to the victims in Ituri and the people of the DRC that those who perpetrate crimes such as rape, torture and summary executions will be held to account," the statement said.

### **More Charges?**

ICC deputy prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said the court had begun with the charges related to child soldiers because evidence was available.

"This doesn't mean the door is shut to other crimes," she told the BBC's Focus on Africa programme.

"The office of the prosecutor is in no way saying other offences were not committed. But the quality of the evidence we have is also important."

The Ituri region of eastern Congo saw 66,000 deaths in six years of fighting between the UPC, based among the Hema ethnic group, and rivals from the Lendu ethnic group, partly for control of Ituri's large deposits of gold.

Mr Lubanga was arrested in 2005 after nine Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers were killed in the volatile Ituri area.

He emerged as one of the most notorious warlords in the civil war of the late 1990s.

Soldiers under his command are accused not just of murder, torture and rape, but also of mutilating their victims.

In one massacre, human rights groups say, Mr Lubanga's militiamen killed civilians using a sledgehammer.

At different times, the UPC was backed by both Uganda and Rwanda - DR Congo's neighbours, which were closely involved in its conflict.

The ICC has also issued its first arrest warrants for the leaders of Uganda's rebel Lord's Resistance Army, who are currently in talks with the Ugandan government, which has offered them amnesty.

It is also investigating alleged war crimes in Sudan's Darfur region.

The existence of the court is strongly opposed by the United States, which fears its troops could face political prosecutions.

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