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## **DRC: Last Rebel Groups Sign Peace Deal in Ituri**

BUNIA — The Congolese government has signed a deal with the last rebel groups in the northeastern district of Ituri to disarm 3,500 militiamen and release 700 child soldiers.

Wednesday's agreement came two days after the Supreme Court of the Democratic Republic of Congo confirmed the result of the 29 October elections proclaiming Joseph Kabila as president.

"There is no more reason for war," Brig-Gen Vainqueur Mayala, commander of the army's Ituri Operational Zone, said in Bunia, the district capital.

Ituri's three armed groups had been given until 31 December to surrender their guns or face the army's wrath. The militias are the Forces de résistance patriotique en Ituri (FRPI), Fronts des nationalistes et intégrationnistes (FNI) and the Mouvement révolutionnaires congolais (MRC).

Congolese Presidential Adviser Alexandre Mwarabu said during Wednesday's disarmament signing ceremony that the government would now table an amnesty in parliament, and commission some of the groups' "officers" into the regular army.

On Tuesday, FRPI leader Cobra Matata was told he would be made a colonel. A similar concession was made in September to FNI leader Peter Karim and to Mathieu Ngujolo, head of the MRC.

Matata sign a cessation of hostilities agreement with the army on Tuesday, the last of the three Ituri warlords to do so. Matata's FRPI controlled the border area with Uganda south of Bunia. With up to 3,500 of the 5,000 remaining fighters in Ituri, his militia was the largest. The FNI has 1,300 and the MRC 200 troops. Their demobilisation is due to begin now that the disarmament accord has been signed. The MRC and the FRPI said they would convert their militias into political parties after the integration of their fighters either into the army or civil society.

On 17 November, MRC military chief Mathieu Ngujolo came out of the bush and returned to Bunia with his personal security guards. The move boosted the peace hopes of Ituri's four million people who had suffered eight years of war.

"If this agreement holds, it will be important for the return of 260,000 [displaced] Ituri residents," Jean Charles Dupin, the head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Ituri, said.

Since the start of its disarmament effort on 1 April 2004, the National

Disarmament Commission, or CONADER, has so far overseen the process for nearly 27,821 Ituri combatants, among them 9,058 children associated with the militias.

This doubles the number of combatants who surrendered their guns in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu, according to CONADER.

Among Ituri's disarmed combatants, 791 have been integrated in the national army, the CONADER director in Ituri, Col Xavier DUKU, said, adding that 17,972 wanted to return to civilian life.

"There is a deadline. Peace has a price and a time. We will no longer tolerate sedition or mutiny," he said.

The UN mission in the DRC, MONUC, also reiterated its commitment to peace.

"We were proud to have been deployed in providing security during the elections. Now that the elections are over, we will ensure that [Ituri] residents can live in peace," Gen Christian Ude, the MONUC field commander, said.

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