

## ***DRC Police News***

### **6 March 2008 (IRIN)**

The violence that has claimed several lives in southeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, after clashes between a religious sect and the national police, could spread further, local activists and officials warned. Simon Mbatshi Mbatsha, governor of Bas-Congo, said provisional estimates indicated that 24 civilians were killed on 4 March - most shot dead during clashes between followers of the Bundu Dia Kongo politico-religious sect and police, deployed from Kinshasa. The toll, he said, could be higher if the killings that occurred days earlier in some parts of the province such as Seke Mbanza and Luozi, a town of 50,000 inhabitants roughly 200km southwest of Kinshasa, were taken into account. Another three suspected sect members, the governor said, were reportedly beaten to death by the local population after they were accused of mutilating a policeman. "We are very worried because the clashes involve unarmed civilians and an armed group who happen to be the police," Ibefo said. "The violence has another dimension because almost all those killed were shot dead and their houses burnt down by those with fire-arms." He blamed the government. "The government is in the process of cultivating violence where it did not exist before," he said. Political solution needed Bundu Dia Kongo, which means "Kingdom of the Congo" in the language of the region, counts among its objectives the emancipation of traditional African or Congolese culture, and demands the restoration of the former Kingdom of the Congo. Its followers have set up tribunals to try citizens they believe have broken the law, sentence them and beat them if guilty. They have also set up a kind of police force called "Makesa", who are armed with whips and consider themselves part of the national police. Occasionally they lower the national flag to hoist their own. "The government should resolve the problem politically. After all, if a solution is not found there will be demands made in ways other than through the Bundu Dia Kongo," Dinzolele Nzabu, Catholic bishop of Luozi diocese, said. "Theoretically, the government should re-establish state authority, but the manner in which it has proceeded is disproportionate." The DRC Interior Minister Gen Denis Kalume said he had sent police reinforcements to Bas-Congo to restore order and protect the local population from the violence perpetrated by the sect and re-establish the state's authority. Ibefo of Voice of the Voiceless insisted that the government action had followed three years of repression of the sect. "Since 2006, their actions have been repressed ... you will recall that at least 250 people, mostly civilians, were killed in February 2007,"