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UN chief Ban Ki-moon expressed deep concern on Thursday about surging sexual violence and a hike in the number of civilians uprooted as a result of fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo's Nord-Kivu province.

A statement said: "The Secretary General is deeply concerned about the increased displacement, human suffering, and sexual violence in Nord Kivu and calls upon the belligerents to ensure unrestricted access of humanitarian efforts to civilians affected by the conflict."

Ban urged the DRC government "to ensure the protection of all civilians in the region" and all dissidents to join the so-called "brassage" process - reintegration of ex-combatants into the national army - "immediately and without conditions.

() UN and human rights officials have also denounced the increasing use of sexual violence against women as a weapon of war in the area, particularly gang rapes where attackers mutilate their victims' genitals until they need surgery.

Full text available at:

[http://www.news24.com/News24/Africa/News/0,,2-11-1447\\_2209394,00.html](http://www.news24.com/News24/Africa/News/0,,2-11-1447_2209394,00.html)