

ICC-01/05-01/08-82-Anx6 22-09-2009 1/3 IO PT

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ANNEX 6

Protests in DR Congo against former rebel leader's arrest

May 26, 2008

KINSHASA (AFP) — Thousands demonstrated on Monday in the power base of former Democratic Republic of Congo vice president Jean-Pierre Bemba to protest his arrest in Belgium on war crimes charges, the UN and witnesses said.

Between 2,000 and 3,000 people demanding Bemba's release rallied in Mbandaka, capital of the province of Equateur and political stronghold of the former rebel leader, wanted for alleged atrocities in neighbouring Central African Republic.

Bemba, 45, seen by followers as a charismatic leader of the main opposition party, was arrested in a Brussels suburb Saturday on an extradition warrant by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague to face four charges of war crimes and two of crimes against humanity.

Witnesses said demonstrators, mainly students and demobilised servicemen, hurled stones at the local office of the UN peacekeeping force MONUC but the demonstration was otherwise peaceful.

"Some windows were broken but these were isolated incidents," said local MONUC head Guirane Ndiaye.

In Mbandaka, Jose Malika, the Equateur governor and a relative of Bemba, told AFP: "All the living forces of Mbandaka took to the streets spontaneously."

"People are angry and have the need to show it," he said, stressing that the march was peaceful.

A statement by the ICC Sunday said personnel led by Bemba were accused of carrying out widespread attacks against civilians in the Central African Republic including "rape, torture, outrages upon personal dignity and pillaging" between October 2002 and March 2003.

One of four vice-presidents in a transitional DR Congo government between 2003 and 2006, Bemba led the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) rebel group, which later became the main opposition party.

Bemba, who also heads a business empire, went into exile in Portugal after his defeat in 2006 elections.

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He appeared Sunday before a Belgian magistrate who ordered that he remain in custody pending extradition proceedings to the ICC in The Hague.