

Congo Warlord Handed to International Court

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THE HAGUE, March 18 — A Congolese militia leader accused of abducting children and turning them into soldiers and sex slaves has become the first suspect to be delivered to the new International Criminal Court, the chief prosecutor announced Saturday.

The former warlord, Thomas Lubanga, arrived at the court's detention center in The Hague late Friday after being flown here on a French military plane, the prosecutor said. Mr. Lubanga had been imprisoned since last year in Congo, whose authorities handed him over to the court for trial.

"He has been accused of conscripting and enlisting children under the age of 15 into armed groups and using them in hostilities," the prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, said at a news conference. The crimes involved were "extremely serious," he said. "Throughout the world, children are being trained to become machines of war."

Mr. Lubanga is scheduled to appear at a court hearing on Monday, the start of a new phase in the history of the I.C.C. The court, the first permanent international war crimes court, was founded in The Hague in 2002 over the objections of the United States.

Mr. Lubanga, 45, was the founder and leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots, one of the most dangerous militias in the Congo's northeastern Ituri district.

Mr. Moreno-Ocampo said that investigators had worked for months in the region almost surreptitiously because armed groups were still active in the area "and they could kill our witnesses." He said that further charges against the militia leader were still being prepared, but much evidence was already available, including photographs from camps where children as young as 7 were being trained to become soldiers.

According to Unicef, the [United Nations](#) children's aid agency, an estimated 30,000 children, most of them abducted, have been used by armed groups in Congo as fighters, messengers, cooks and sex slaves.

Mr. Lubanga's case will be one in a series of cases against militia leaders in Congolese-Rwandan border region, the prosecutor said.

The militias have been financed and supplied by a number of countries, including [Uganda](#) and [Rwanda](#), in a fight over a region rich in minerals and timber.

"We think this is an important first step and we urge the prosecutor to go further and higher, up to the political actors who were manipulating these militias for their own ends," said Richard Dicker, a director of Human Rights Watch, based in New York.

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