Beat: Miscellaneous

DR Congo arms depot blast devastates city, killing 20-plus

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USPA News - A massive arms depot explosion triggered by a lightning strike destroyed "many" homes in a city in the southern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, killing at least 20 people and injuring more than 50 others, the United Nations (UN) said on Saturday. The accident happened on early Friday afternoon when a lightning strike sparked a fire at a military barrack in Mbuji Mayi, the capital of Kasai-Oriental province and the country`s third largest city.

It led to an enormous explosion at the camp`s ammunition depot, causing massive destruction in the surrounding area. Governor Alphonse Ngoy Kasanji had said late Friday that the preliminary death toll stood at five, but UN peacekeeping mission MONUSCO said on Saturday that the death toll had further increased. "Over 20 people died, more than 50 were injured and many houses were destroyed by the blast, causing desolation in the city," the mission said in a statement. MONUSCO head Martin Kobler expressed his "deep sadness" at the loss of lives and extended his condolences to the families of the victims. "I wish a speedy recovery to all the injured. I have instructed our office in Mbuji Mayi to stand by and support local authorities in dealing with the situation," he said. Kasanji had earlier called on residents in the city to remain call after the explosion, which destroyed both residential houses as well as public buildings including the office of the Vice President of the Provincial Assembly, although it was unclear if any officials were among the dead. Shrapnel also caused damage in other parts of the city, including at a busy market where students were injured. In July 2010, at least 230 people were killed when an overturned fuel tanker caused a massive explosion in a town in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Among those killed were local residents who were attempting to steal fuel which had leaked from the tanker.

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