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AFRICA

Rebels killed hundreds in Democratic Republic of Congo, officials say

By [Erin Cunningham](#)

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Nearly 300 people were killed when rebels attacked villagers in the Democratic Republic of Congo last week, officials said Monday, raising the death toll from an earlier estimate of 50 as fighting intensified in the country's east.

The government blamed the carnage in Kishishe in North Kivu province on the M23 rebel group, which [denied responsibility](#) for the attacks. M23 is largely made up of Congolese Tutsi, an ethnic group present throughout the Great Lakes region, according to the Brussels-based [International Crisis Group](#). The rebellion was long dormant but reemerged last year to threaten the Congolese government in Kinshasa.

"We are looking at around 300 deaths" in the area, Julien Paluku, North Kivu's former governor, said at a news briefing in the capital Monday, [Agence France-Presse reported](#). Paluku and government spokesman Patrick Muyaya briefed reporters on the new casualty details, citing civil society and community groups.

"Every community has been able to record the people who died from units in Kishishe and its environs," said Paluku, who now serves as industry minister, adding that "one community alone has more than 105 deaths."

According to reports, including one from the United Nations Human Rights Office, the killings took place between Nov. 28 and Nov. 30, during and after clashes between M23 and other armed groups.

"Reports say some were killed in their homes, others at a church where they had sought refuge and some died fleeing the hostilities," U.N. Human Rights Office spokesperson Marta Hurtado [said in a statement](#) Friday. "We fear that the number of civilian casualties might be higher, as dozens of people are still unaccounted for."

The alleged massacre took place less than a week after African leaders [agreed to an immediate cease-fire](#) in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, releasing a joint statement after talks in Angola's capital, Luanda.

Both Kinshasa and the U.N. have accused Rwanda of backing M23 — a charge Kigali denies. On Monday, Muyaya said the Democratic Republic of Congo planned to request that the International Criminal Court at The Hague investigate the incident. An ICC spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

“We denounce these appalling acts and call on all competent authorities to investigate without delay and bring the perpetrators to justice,” the U.N. Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo said on Twitter last week. “These allegations, if confirmed, would constitute crimes under international humanitarian law.”