

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Democratic Republic of the Congo



Risk Level: Current Crisis

Various armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo recurrently and indiscriminately attack civilian populations, committing violations that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

BACKGROUND:

Attacks by armed groups and recurring inter-communal violence have threatened populations in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for more than 30 years. Over 120 militias and armed groups operate in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika provinces, many regularly perpetrating widespread violations that may [amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes](#). The UN Security Council (UNSC)-mandated Panel of Experts (PoE) has documented armed groups allegedly executing, torturing and arbitrarily detaining civilians perceived as collaborators of enemy groups. While combating armed groups, the government's armed forces (FARDC) and police have also been implicated in violations of International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including sexual violence, torture and arbitrary killings, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Despite offensives conducted by the FARDC, supported by the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO), violence has escalated in the eastern provinces for several years amidst a surge in attacks by groups like the March 23 Movement (M23), Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), Cooperative for the Development of Congo (CODECO) and the Democratic Forces

for the Liberation of Rwanda, among others. Ongoing armed group activity has resulted in a marked increase in conflict-related sexual violence and grave violations against children. Recurrent clashes and insecurity have resulted in a displacement crisis, with over 7.8 million people internally displaced. Armed groups regularly perpetrate attacks against displacement sites, killing hundreds of civilians and causing further displacement.

Since 2021, when M23 re-emerged after several years of dormancy, the group has perpetrated widespread attacks across North and South Kivu amid clashes with the FARDC and Wazalendo, a government-backed militia. The PoE and UN Human Rights Council (HRC)-mandated Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) have documented evidence of the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) providing support to M23, with at least 3,000-4,000 soldiers fighting alongside the group. At the start of 2025, M23 intensified its offensive in North and South Kivu. Throughout its 2025 offensive, M23 captured key cities in eastern DRC, including Goma and Bukavu, consolidating control over mineral-rich areas, and intensified attacks on civilian areas. The clashes have been characterized by serious human rights violations and abuses, including summary executions and conflict-related sexual violence. Displacement sites have come under heavy artillery fire amid widespread looting and indiscriminate attacks on shelters, water, sanitation and health facilities.

The International Criminal Court has been investigating serious crimes in the DRC since 2004. In June 2023 the Chief Prosecutor launched a new preliminary examination into alleged crimes committed in North Kivu since January 2022 following a DRC government request. In response to the deteriorating situation in South and North Kivu, in February 2025 the HRC established the FFM and authorized a subsequent Commission of Inquiry (Col) to investigate serious human rights violations and abuses and IHL violations committed in these provinces since January 2022. In 2025 the FFM concluded that all parties – namely M23, RDF, FARDC, Wazalendo and affiliated groups – have perpetrated violations that may constitute war crimes and/or crimes against humanity. M23 allegedly committed torture, sexual violence and enforced disappearance. The FARDC, Wazalendo and other allied militias committed deliberate killings of civilians, widespread sexual violence, looting and the forcible recruitment and use of children.

On 19 December 2025 the UNSC extended MONUSCO's mandate for another year, maintaining the mission's presence in North Kivu and Ituri. Deployments linked to ceasefire monitoring in South Kivu are contingent on security conditions and prior notification to the Council. The extension follows a reassessment of the exit strategy in response to a rapidly deteriorating protection environment. MONUSCO had withdrawn from South Kivu in June 2024 under an agreed disengagement plan, after the Congolese government requested an accelerated exit in 2023.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS:

Following escalating clashes between the M23 and FARDC, over half a million people have been forced to flee their homes in South Kivu alone since the start of December 2025. In January 2026 FARDC soldiers and Wazalendo forces recaptured the city of Uvira in South Kivu after M23 withdrew in response to a United States (US) request amid the ongoing peace agreements. However, populations remain vulnerable, with credible reports emerging from human rights organizations that Wazalendo militias have targeted civilians,

especially Tutsi minorities. In early March a drone strike killed at least two residents and a UN Children's Fund staffer in Goma, marking the second aid worker to be killed in 2026. Humanitarian insecurity has worsened significantly in the past year: 13 aid workers were killed in eastern DRC in 2025 compared with 9 in 2024.

Throughout 2025, international pressure on M23 and Rwanda increased. In December 2025 the DRC and Rwanda reaffirmed the US-brokered peace agreement signed on 27 June, committing to cease hostilities in North and South Kivu, respect territorial integrity and end support for non-state armed groups. Qatar has mediated separate negotiations between the DRC government and M23, culminating in the Doha Framework for Peace on 15 November.

With FARDC forces redeployed to counter M23, other armed groups, particularly the ADF and CODECO, have exploited the security vacuum in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. According to MONUSCO, more than 1,000 civilians have been killed in Ituri and North Kivu since June 2025. More recently, the ADF have perpetrated attacks in Lubero territory, killing at least 15 people in December 2025 and 20 in February.

ANALYSIS:

For decades, various armed groups have exploited the absence or weakness of state authority in eastern DRC to perpetrate attacks against civilians. Rampant impunity and competition for control of profitable minerals have enabled the proliferation of such groups. Ethnically motivated and deliberate attacks against displaced Congolese have led to waves of secondary displacement while sexual violence continues to be used as a weapon of war. Widespread armed group activity has impeded MONUSCO's ability to protect civilians and conduct life-saving operations, leaving populations vulnerable.

Despite the signing of peace agreements, the security situation in eastern DRC remains highly volatile. Armed violence continues to fuel [hate speech and discrimination](#), heightening grievances and the risk of further atrocities. The presence of FARDC-aligned ethnic militias with well-documented records of abuse, including attacks against civilians, poses ongoing risks, and the government may incur responsibility where it fails to prevent or adequately respond to crimes committed by forces operating alongside state security actors.

A military solution will not resolve the political, social and economic drivers of the conflicts in the eastern provinces, including the illegal exploitation of natural resources and ethnically motivated attacks. The US-mediated peace deal offers a rare diplomatic opening, but it lacks key commitments to justice, accountability and redress. In parallel with the ceasefire agreement, a strategic partnership agreement between the US and DRC, which includes provisions on critical minerals access and cooperation, risks replicating extractive dynamics that have fueled conflict in eastern DRC.

RISK ASSESSMENT:

- ○ ■ Continuous hostilities inflicting large-scale civilian casualties and destruction of critical infrastructure.
- Armed groups consolidating political and economic authority amid unprecedented illegal mining exploitation and cross-border smuggling.
- Widespread conflict-related sexual violence, disproportionately impacting displaced women and girls.
- Escalating child recruitment and use by myriad armed actors.
- An existing security vacuum in eastern DRC emboldening other armed groups to remobilize and target civilians.

NECESSARY ACTION:

All forces operating in the DRC must prioritize the protection of civilians and compliance with IHL and IHRL. The FARDC should implement a vetting process to identify and provisionally remove individuals who may have been implicated in serious human rights violations, and cease using abusive militias as proxy forces. The FARDC and police should thoroughly investigate and publicly report on any violations by their forces. Rwanda should end its military support for M23 and respect the DRC's territorial integrity.

The international community should suspend military assistance to governments backing armed groups, ensure that any support – financial or otherwise – does not fuel human rights abuses and intensify pressure on all parties to halt support for armed actors, guarantee humanitarian access and commit to genuine peace efforts. Accountability must be central to international efforts to address the crisis, including support for the full operationalization of the HRC-mandated Col. All parties should implement the recommendations from the FFM and the Team of International Experts on the DRC. Guarantors of the Washington Accords must take concrete action to enforce compliance with IHL and IHRL.

Any mineral trade deal must prioritize human rights, civilian protection and environmental safeguards, as well as strengthen supply chain due diligence and ensure equitable benefit-sharing.

