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MSF – Médecins Sans Frontières (Author)

Alarming numbers of sexual violence victims in camps around Goma

- Women at high risk of sexual violence when searching for food or firewood outside displacement camps in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).
- Living conditions in camps must be urgently improved and protection measures must be put in place, warns Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

Goma – In just two weeks, more than 670 victims of [sexual violence](#) have been treated by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) teams in camps for [displaced people](#) around Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu, in the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) (DRC). This represents 48 new victims per day.

These shocking figures reflect the extreme vulnerability and risk of violence faced by displaced people in the area. Nearly 60 per cent of the victims were attacked less than 72 hours before coming to MSF clinics, illustrating the urgency of the situation.

Clashes between the Congolese army, the M23, and the many armed groups in North Kivu have led more than a million people to flee their homes since March 2022. Over 600,000 people have found refuge in camps on the outskirts of the city of Goma, where conditions are often overcrowded and unsanitary.

“For months, our teams have been treating a high number of cases, but never before on the catastrophic scale of recent weeks.” Jason Rizzo, MSF emergency coordinator in North Kivu

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From 17 to 30 April 2023, MSF teams treated 674 victims of sexual violence in Bulengo, Lushagala, Kanyaruchinya, Eloime, Munigi, including 360 in Rusayo alone, one of the newest and most densely populated camps located west of Goma. These figures are likely to be fewer than the true number of people affected by sexual violence as they only take into account the consultations carried out by our teams in the camps where we are present.

“Each day, an average of 48 new victims of sexual violence are being treated by our teams in the camps for displaced people,” says Jason Rizzo, MSF emergency coordinator in North Kivu.

“For months, our teams have been treating a high number of cases, but never before on the catastrophic scale of recent weeks. Nearly 60 per cent of victims present within 72 hours of their

attack, showing it is an ongoing medical and humanitarian emergency.”

Almost all the victims treated by our teams are women and the majority recount being attacked while searching for food or firewood outside of the displacement camps. In Rusayo, Bulengo and Kanyaruchinya, more than half of the victims also reported being attacked by armed men.

“After we arrived here, one of my children started to show signs of [malnutrition](#). I couldn't stand by and do nothing. I decided to go to the forest to collect wood to sell, so I could buy food. That's when I came across bandits who attacked me,” says a displaced woman living in Rusayo camp.

Despite various humanitarian and relief organisations increasing activities in recent weeks, the living conditions in camps around Goma remain disastrous and the people living there experience a lack of the most basic necessities such as food, latrines, water and shelter.

The critical shortage of humanitarian assistance increases the vulnerability of displaced people and exacerbates the risk of violence they may be subjected to.

“It is urgent to improve people’s living conditions in the camps,” says Rizzo. “Basic needs, such as access to food, water and sanitation, must be guaranteed. Protection measures must be provided to keep women, in particular, out of harm's way,” he says.

MSF provides free and confidential medical and psychological care to all victims of sexual violence in the main camps for displaced people around Goma. To avoid medical complications related to sexual assault, it is essential that victims present themselves to a health facility within 72 hours of the attack to receive appropriate medical care.

Since May 2022, MSF teams have been working in camps for displaced people around Goma, providing medical care, supplying clean water, and building latrines and showers where they are most needed. We have also responded to cholera and measles outbreaks in some camps by treating cases and organising vaccination campaigns.

Our teams are also working in Sake and Kayna in North Kivu province and in Minova in South Kivu to improve access to healthcare in these areas, where tens of thousands of displaced people have also taken refuge. In North Kivu, we continue to provide free essential medical care in Rutshuru, Kibirizi, Bambo, Binza, Mweso, Masisi and Walikale.

ecoi.net description:

Nord-Kivu: High number of incidents of sexual violence against women outside IDP camps in the city of Goma

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