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CEASEFIRE IN MURHESA, LITTLE IMPACT ON THE GROUND

MONTHLY REPORT N°35 - SEPTEMBER 2020

121 violent deaths (↓5% from august)
92 abducted or kidnapped (↓7%)
60 clashes (↓14%)

Despite a slight fall in the number of clashes and civilians killed, abducted, and kidnapped compared to August, the level of violence remained high in September, well above historical monthly averages since the Kivu Security Tracker (KST) started collecting such data in June 2017.

Several peace initiatives may have raised hopes for a more substantial decrease in violence. A ceasefire agreement was signed in Murhesa, near Bukavu, on September 16. Called “Murhesa II,” this agreement was signed by armed groups in South Kivu under the auspices of the Minister of Defense, Sylvain Mutombo, by the “Interprovincial Commission Tasked to Support the Awareness, Disarmament, Demobilization and Community Reintegration Process” (CIAP-DDRC), with the support of the NGO, Search for Common Ground (SFCG), and the Cohesive Leadership Initiative (ILC). Seventy armed groups were represented according to organizers, even though some major groups, such as the Mai-Mai Yakutumba (one of the most influential groups of the province), had boycotted the initiative.

The agreement was signed on September 16. However, there has been no immediate change in KST data. There has only been a very small drop in the number of incidents logged: 23 incidents (including 13 clashes, resulting in a total of 6 civilians killed from September 1 to 15 in South Kivu, compared to 21 incidents (including 8 clashes, resulting in a total of 6 civilians killed from August 16 to 30).

Moreover, the official mayoral appointment in the rural town of Minembwe (a town in the highlands riddled with conflict) was held on September 28. The presence of government officials at the ceremony may have contributed to heightened tensions in the area.

The regional summit that President Félix Tshisekedi had scheduled for September 13 in Goma was also postponed [at the request of Burundi](#). Gitega preferred that bilateral discussions with Kinshasa take place prior to any regional summit. This unrelenting mistrust between the DRC and its neighbors is one of the many reasons conflict persists in the Kivus.

Beni: No Progress Against the ADF

Beni territory was once again the scene of civilian killings in September. KST logged the violent death of 60 civilians, slightly more than in August (59) and nearly twice the monthly average recorded in this territory since such data was first collected by KST in June 2017.

The vast majority of deaths (53 out of 60) were once again attributed to attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Neither the arrival of General Peter Cirimwami at the head of FARDC's operation "Sukola 1" in July nor the [announced retaking of ADF strongholds near Kainama in August](#) (in French), appear to have had a meaningful impact on the number or scale of civilian killings. The ADF even managed to [attack the FARDC near Kainama on September 4](#) and [5](#), suggesting that they are still active in the area.

The location of the killings remains unchanged as a whole: these include Rwenzori in the east, the border with Ituri in the north and the outskirts of Mbau in the center of the territory. In regards to the killings in Mbau, the [spokesperson for the operation referred to a possible "settling of scores," without providing further details](#) (in French). This statement however [was refuted by members of local civil society](#) (in French).

Lubero, Rutshuru and Walikale: A Surrender but Only Partly a Solution

In August, Gilbert Bwira, leader of a dissident group of Nduma Defense of Congo-Rénové (NDC-R), announced the surrender of 500 of his men to the FARDC. Some of his men that were quartered in the Rumangabo camp in Rutshuru territory protested their abandonment and lack of food at the camp. Subsequently, they [launched an incursion and looted the nearby village of Kabaya](#).

As stated in the August Monthly Report, these men only represent part of Bwira's troops. His remaining troops, still active, continued to operate in coalition with the FARDC.

This did not prevent his rival, the historical head of the NDC-R, Guidon Shimiray, from taking the neighborhood of Katanga in Pinga on September 15. He eventually retreated, following pressure from community leaders and threats by the FARDC. However, he was attacked shortly after by the [coalition between Bwira and the FARDC on September 21 in Kailenge and Kaseke](#).

On September 7, representatives of Guidon (NDC-R) and Janvier Karairi (Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS) held meetings in Pinga with the goal of securing an alliance against Bwira. These discussions were apparently inconclusive in part due to regional alliance considerations. Janvier Karairi, a historical ally of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), is known for being hostile towards the Kigali government. However, Guidon has long fought the FDLR and [may have received assistance from Kigali in the past](#).

The fighting between Bwira and Guidon has benefitted one of their longtime enemies: the Popular Patriotic Forces, People's Army (FPP/AP) of Kabido. This group from Lubero territory was able to launch incursions into Walikale territory like they did in the [village of Kisone on September 12](#). It was within this group's area of influence that [a World Vision agent was killed on September 16](#).

In the south of Walikale territory, the [Mai-Mai Kifuafua Delphin carried out a mass rape \(seven victims\) in Gdabo](#) on September 11. This incident is probably linked to a conflict over customary power. The village in question is the birthplace of the new head of the town of Walao-Luanda. Appointed at the end of August, his legitimacy has been contested by another candidate for the post.

Masisi: Hotbeds of Killings

KST logged the death of 21 civilians in Masisi territory in September (a record since February 2020) as well as nine clashes.

Such figures are due to the offensive launched by the FARDC against the APCLS (see previous section) around Miandja: five clashes took place between the two forces between September 16 and 28. Despite this, the FARDC failed to root out the APCLS from the area.

The areas surrounding the Rubaya cassiterite and coltan mine, in the south of the territory, was the scene of three incidents which resulted in the death of five civilians, a police officer and a soldier. This cycle of violence followed the killing of a local police commander in the village of Muderu by armed men on September 10. Two days later, the police attempted to chase artisanal miners out of the Bisunzu Mining Company (SMB) site, killing four of them. There has been ongoing conflict between the SMB and the artisanal miners of the Masisi Artisanal Miners Cooperative (Cooperamma) for many years.

However, most of the civilian victims in Masisi territory in September (13 out of 21) were killed by unidentified armed men relatively dispersed areas across the territory, which might point to an upsurge in ordinary crime.

A Doctors Without Borders agent was also kidnapped on September 23 between Nyabiondo and the center of Masisi. He was released several hours later.

Rutshuru: Split in the Turarambiwe

Several battles took place near Rugai, between September 26 and 29. These battles were reported to have been waged initially between the Nyatura of the Collective of Movements for Change (CMC) and the Turarambiwe. The Turarambiwe is a relatively recent group composed of ex-Nyatura Mamba and former members of the March 23 Movement (M23). Although both movements are largely made up of Rwandophone militia, this alliance was surprising insofar as the mostly Hutu Nyatura were the sworn enemies of the mostly Tutsi M23 and supported by the Kigali government when they were still active in 2012 and 2013.

The two heads of the Turarambiwe, Mamba and Bosse, are reported to have clashed. The local population is said to have blamed Mamba for allying himself with former M23 members which accelerated this breakup.

Fizi, Mwenga, Uvira: Tensions in the FARDC's ranks

High tensions were recorded [at the end of August in the highlands of South Kivu](#). These tensions continued unabated into early September. On September 1, a [detachment of the FARDC 12th Rapid Reaction Force Brigade lost a man in an ambush set by the Twirwaneho of renegade Colonel Michel Rukunda, also known as Makanika](#). Makanika is himself a former FARDC officer and member of the Banyamulenge community who defected in January 2020 to take command

of a “self-defense” community movement, claiming that the FARDC was doing nothing to protect the community.

The ambush kindled internal tensions within state forces, who suspected the presence of accomplices in their ranks. At least three clashes within state forces took place in September.

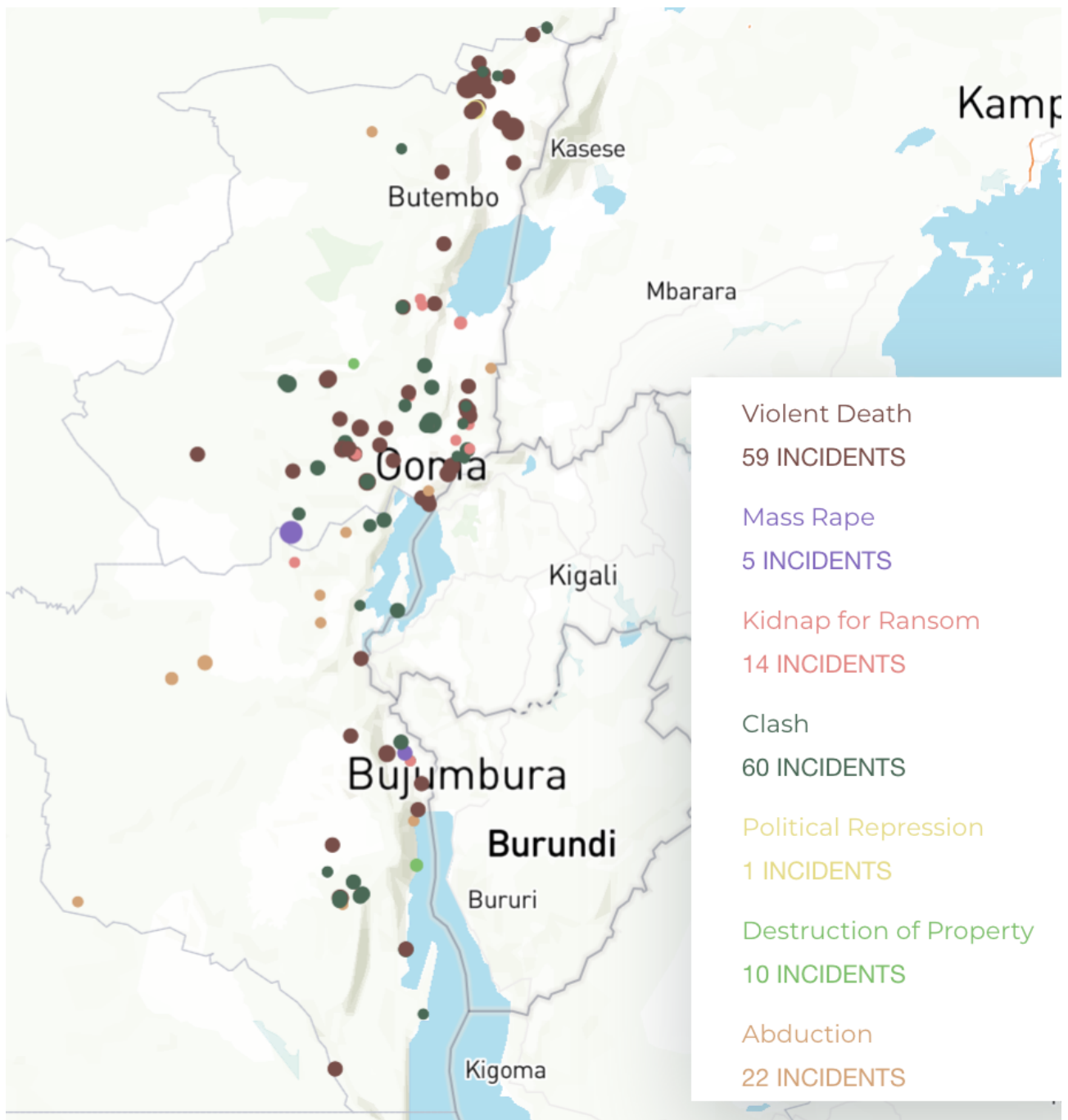
On the evening of September 1, [a member of the FARDC 12th Brigade killed a Munyamulenge National Congolese Police officer stationed at Minembwe](#). Later that day, members of the same unit opened fire on an officer belonging to their own brigade. The officer in question, also from the Banyamulenge community, was in charge of logistics for the 12th Brigade, and therefore involved in the convoy’s preparations. He survived the attack.

In this context, FARDC members supplied arms and ammunition to various Mai-Mai groups, which enabled them to launch a vast offensive against the Twigwaneho.

This collusion between certain members of the FARDC and some Mai-Mai groups appears to be happening despite the existing tensions between FARDC members and the [arrest of two FARDC officers who were transferred to Saïo military base in Bukavu](#).

At the end of September, a delegation comprising the Minister of Decentralization, Azarias Ruberwa, and the Minister of Defense, Aimé Ngoy Mukena, attended the appointment of the new mayor of the rural town Minembwe. The creation of this local administrative entity, demographically dominated by the Banyamulenge, is one of the chief complaints of the Mai-Mai groups used to justify their attacks against this community.

The presence of members of the Burundi National Defense Force was eventually confirmed by local civil society sources, intelligence services, and a local armed group who were employed as trackers. After having entered the Ruzizi valley (on the border of Burundi and the DRC), they advanced into the village of Kigoma. This incursion occurred following the [infiltration of RED-Tabara Burundi rebels in Burundi from the South Kivu in August](#).



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