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Protection Alert: Escalating Crisis in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo

14 February 2025

The Global Protection Cluster (GPC) is issuing this urgent Protection Alert in response to the ongoing escalation of violence in South Kivu, particularly in the territories of Kalehe, Kabare and the surroundings areas of Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu. The crisis, driven by intensifying clashes between the FARDC (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and M23 elements in the High and Middle Plateaus of Kalehe, has led to widespread displacement and severe human rights violations. The M23 offensive towards Bukavu is of a particular protection concern, especially following the withdrawal of the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) from the province in June 2024.

Since the outbreak of violence, M23 forces have continued to advance significantly into South Kivu, capturing key localities including Minova, Bulenga, Kalungu, Numbi, Lumbishi, Shanje, Mukwija, Kiniezire, Makelele, Nyabibwe, Bujuki, Lushebere, Nyamukubi, Bushushu, Ihusi and Kalehe. Katana, another major city in the province, fell this Friday 14th of February 2025 with M23 now advancing towards Kavumu airport. This advance has caused massive displacement of populations coming from North Kivu and South Kivu, with many fleeing towards the southern parts of Kabare and neighboring territories in Idjwi island, and the city of Bukavu¹. The situation has severely disrupted the daily lives of civilians, forcing entire households to abandon their homes in search of safety.

The consequences of this violence are devastating for the civilian population in South Kivu province. Armed elements, lacking access to essential supplies, have increasingly targeted civilians in villages, fields, and markets to loot goods and replenish their resources. Reports of severe human rights violations continue to emerge, including rape, assaults, looting, forced labor, and forced recruitment.

The rapid advance of M23 forces, with the stated objective of capturing key strategic locations such as Kavumu airport and probably the city of Bukavu, has raised widespread concern among the local population. With the M23 now just 40 kilometers away, residents of Bukavu are on high alert, fearing further escalation and potential threats to their safety. Many are already fleeing to the south or abroad, if they can afford to do so. The city is home to 1.3 million people. In coming days, it is expected that there will be an even larger influx of people into Bukavu, followed by population movements towards the South. According to several humanitarian and protection partners, armed clashes within the city of Bukavu would

¹ While it is challenging to obtain exact figures on population movement due to the fluid situation, the [Humanitarian Coordinator](#) estimates that the recent clashes in the province have displaced at least 170,000 people. This figure does not account for displacement over the past two weeks. Protection partners conducting monitoring activities in the province have also reported that 201,285 individuals were displaced to Kalehe and Bunyakiri, between January 23 and February 06. [OCHA](#) estimates that since January 29, at least 30,000 people from villages along the Minova coastline (Kasunyu, Nyamasasa, Ruhunde, Karango, and Kiniezire/Mukwidja) have been displaced to the Idjwi territory, as well as to Kalehe center, Katana, Kavumu, Mudaka, and Bukavu.

have more severe consequences for civilians than in Goma, considering the geographical, demographic and security configuration.

The displacement crisis is among the most alarming aspects of this situation. Thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes multiple times as the conflict continues to evolve. The vast majority of these internally displaced persons (IDPs) are left with limited access to humanitarian aid and protection.

Humanitarian access in South Kivu remains a challenge, as the road between Goma and Bukavu has been inaccessible since the re-escalation of violence in January. Alternative routes, including those via Lake Kivu, have also been blocked, leaving Kavumu airport as the main access point.

In light of the escalating violence and its devastating impact on civilians, we call for:

- An immediate halt to hostilities, avoiding in particular armed clashes within the city of Bukavu.
- Immediate and robust action to strengthen the protection of civilians in and around the localities of Kavumu, Bukavu and its surroundings.
- Unimpeded humanitarian access to affected populations in South Kivu and safe passage of civilians fleeing active combat zones.
- Engage all parties to establish and respect protected zones and humanitarian spaces that not only provide refuge for civilians but also safeguard essential humanitarian infrastructures, including warehouses.

Urgent measures must be taken to ensure the safety and dignity of those affected by the ongoing conflict, prevent further human rights violations, and provide support to the growing number of displaced populations. The Protection Cluster continues to closely monitor the situation through ongoing communication with partners on the ground and community-based structures, who serve as the backbone of the protection response in the DRC. Despite extremely challenging circumstances, protection partners are committed and ready to deliver essential assistance to those in need.

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