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UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Violence erupts in DR Congo's west as nearly 30,000 flee clashes

This is a summary of what was said by UNHCR Representative in the DRC, Angele Dikongue-Atangana – to whom quoted text may be attributed – at today's press briefing at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is alarmed by a surge of deadly intercommunal violence which has displaced thousands since July in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's western locality of Kwamouth.

Clashes reportedly started over customary taxes on agricultural land use between the Teke and Yaka communities. More than 142 people have been killed, including some who were beheaded.

As of 6 October, some 27,000 – most of them women and children – have been displaced by the violence and need urgent assistance in Kwilu and Mai Ndombe provinces. Another 2,600 people have sought refuge in the Republic of the Congo after crossing the Congo River in canoes. Many have become separated from family members during their flight.

Heavy rains have made getting to safety more difficult for civilians, and several key routes have become impassable to humanitarian vehicles delivering life-saving assistance.

Families remain traumatized by the sudden and violent clashes that erupted in the past weeks. They told our teams that they fled for their lives and found refuge in the surrounding forest with their children. Many have left their farms and fields and abandoned their harvests in the granaries. The displaced continue to feel vulnerable because their survival depends on the goodwill of others, including host families and the authorities.

The government has negotiated with local leaders and has deployed DR Congo's army to Kwamouth to restore order. However, the security situation remains tense.

Many families who were living in Kwamouth and surrounding villages have left the area as the conflict was quickly spreading. They walked for days before reaching safety in Bandundu, the capital of Kwilu Province, 245 kilometers from Kwamouth town. Kwamouth town and several surrounding villages are now partly abandoned.

Host families in Bandundu and other towns have been welcoming those forced to flee, with several local chiefs leading by example. One of them is hosting 28 people, including a woman who underwent a caesarean section in the hospital in Bandundu shortly after the clashes and a young man who was injured during the fighting. Another host family that the assessment team visited is accommodating 77 people with just one toilet for all. The living conditions are precarious, with host families' resources quickly running out. Households have begun rationing and some eat only one meal a day.

The provincial governments in Mai Ndombé and Kwilu have established a crisis coordination committee and a multi-sectoral government-level plan to address needs.

UNHCR and partners are scaling up support. UNHCR is dispatching tarpaulins to building community shelters in Bandundu and is ready to support other priority needs for shelter, household items and protection.

In the Republic of the Congo, local communities and authorities have welcomed the arriving asylum-seekers. UNHCR is supporting authorities at the border, including by registering new arrivals and providing assistance.

Once in the Republic of the Congo, many asylum-seekers are received by host families. However, more than half are living in precarious conditions, some sleeping in the open air, while others have erected makeshift shelters. Those with host families face crowded conditions. Food is scarce. Over 30 malnourished children have been identified by local health staff, including one child with severe malnutrition who was referred to the nearest hospital in Gamboma.

UNHCR is calling on the international community to support efforts to ease tensions in Kwamouth and alleviate the suffering of those affected by the violence.

The latest displacement in the DRC exacerbates an already severely underfunded response to assist the 521,000 refugees and more than 5.5 million internally displaced people from the country. Just 40 per cent of the US\$225.4 million required has been funded.

In the Republic of the Congo, UNHCR has only received 16 per cent of the requested US\$37.4 million needed for its refugee response in 2022.

ecoi.net summary:



Mai-Ndombe province:

Close to 30,000 people flee due to intercommunal violence in Kwamouth

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Congo, Democratic Republic

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[UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#)

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