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DRC: Authorities must end support for armed group suspected of war crimes

An armed group backed by the Congolese army (FARDC) has killed and tortured civilians, looted property, and abducted women as sexual slaves in Rutshuru territory in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Amnesty International said today.

The Collective of Movements for Change-People's Defence Forces (CMC-FDP) is a member of the Wazalendo ("patriots" in Swahili), a loose coalition of armed groups that the Congolese army uses as proxy forces in its ongoing fight against the Rwanda-backed March 23 Movement (M23). CMC-FDP operates primarily in the Bukombo area of Rutshuru, which is currently controlled by M23.

CMC-FDP maintains remote bases in Bukombo and targets civilians, often at night, or in areas with few M23 fighters. After clashes with M23, CMC-FDP fighters have taken revenge on family members with perceived links to M23. These abuses against civilians violate international humanitarian law and could amount to war crimes.

"Civilians who live in and around Bukombo are trapped, caught between the brutality of M23 and CMC-FDP. What they are forced to endure on a daily basis is horrific, especially in remote areas where the CMC-FDP operates with complete impunity," said Tigere Chagutah, Amnesty International's Regional Director for East and Southern Africa.

"DRC authorities often condemn M23 abuses, as they should, but ignore similar violence and abuses committed by Wazalendo, including the CMC-FDP. They are effectively sanctioning these crimes and shirking their responsibility to protect civilians and bring Wazalendo fighters to justice. International actors must press the DRC government to immediately cease support for these armed groups."

Between March and April 2026, Amnesty International conducted remote interviews by secure phone applications with 16 victims, survivors, and family members of civilians killed, raped, tortured, abducted, or ill-treated by CMC-FDP fighters between June and December 2025. Amnesty International also received credible reports from human rights defenders of similar abuses in the area by the group, including summary killings and the burning of houses.

Amnesty International wrote to CMC-FDP on 8 June 2026 sharing its findings and requesting information about the conduct of CMC-FDP commanders and fighters toward civilians in areas it controls. CMC-FDP spokesperson Héritier Donald Gashegu responded in writing on 16 June 2026. CMC-FDP denied responsibility for the abuses documented here and asserted that "CMC-FDP remains committed to respecting human rights and the discipline of its combatants."

Rape and sexual violence against women

A woman in her early 20s told Amnesty International that after her husband joined M23 in May 2025, CMC-FDP fighters abducted her from her home, and held her captive for three months. "They gave me a choice, they would either kill me, or I had to go with them," she said.

She said that CMC-FDP fighters detained her in a house in their camp and presented her with a commander who would be her "husband." Fighters gave her a cup of taro root and corn every other day to eat. She said she saw two other women who were also detained in the camp, but fighters threatened to shoot her if she talked to them. She said the commander raped her repeatedly. "I thought if I refused, he would kill me. He came every night [for sex]." She fled when M23 attacked the CMC-FDP camp.

Amnesty International also interviewed a 22-year-old woman who said that CMC-FDP fighters abducted her in June 2025 after her husband joined M23. They took her to their base in Mudugudu in Bukombo where she too was forced to be the "wife" of a commander. "He said, 'If you don't have sex with me, I'm going to kill you'." She said there were four other women in the camp who were also forced to be the "wives" of fighters.

She said she also saw civilians detained and abused at the camp. "They would take people and bring them to the base. If you had nothing of value, they would beat you. If you were lucky, they would leave you alone. There were [underground detention cells] where they would put people. They detained people for money." This amounts to the war crime of hostage taking.

She fled in October 2025 after M23 attacked the camp.

The two sexual violence survivors that Amnesty International interviewed were held in conditions that amount to sexual slavery. The survivors said that they had contracted sexually transmitted infections after their rapes, which caused them pain and suffering. Both women were treated at health centres but many survivors of sexual violence by Wazalendo armed groups do not have access to appropriate medical or psychological care.

Sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence committed in the context of armed conflict are serious violations of international humanitarian law that amount to war crimes. They also violate several human rights, including the rights to equality and non-discrimination, to physical integrity, and the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment.

CMC-FDP said that it "categorically rejects" the allegations that its fighters raped, sexually enslaved or forced women to "marry" its commanders. "No complaints, official reports, or referrals have been brought to the attention of our internal disciplinary or judicial bodies regarding the mentioned incidents."

CMC-FDP leaders should have known of the abusive actions by its commanders. They could be complicit in these abuses if they knew that they were taking place and failed to act to prevent or stop them.

Ill-treatment and other abuses against women

On 20 November 2025, eight people, including a pregnant woman and her husband, took refuge in a banana grove in Mashango, a village in Bukombo, during a firefight between M23 and local armed groups, the CMC-FDP likely among them.

The armed fighters found them and asked for cooking oil. "We told them we do not have any more oil. They [then] pillaged everything in our house and burnt our houses. One (of the fighters) had pity on me. He said: 'This woman is pregnant and is about to give birth, we need to spare her'."

The woman said that they were CMC-FDP fighters because the group had a base in Mashango, in the Bukombo, an area that the group controlled.

The fighters took her husband away and killed him. "They cut him up with machetes. All the people were killed with machetes. I [later] went to look for bodies ... we found their bodies when they were already decomposing." The woman gave birth to a baby boy, alone, in the forest at 5:30 pm the same day.

Another female survivor told Amnesty that her husband joined M23 in June 2025, and CMC-FDP fighters came to her house the following month. "There were four of them [who came] at noon," she said. "Two had guns and two had wooden rods. I told them, please have pity on me, I'm pregnant. They said, 'our problem is not your pregnancy; we want to see your husband.' They hit me many times. They beat me and injured me with a knife. The next day, I miscarried."

CMC-FDP denied the allegation that they pillaged and burned houses.

Revenge killings and summary killings

Nine victims and survivors told Amnesty International that CMC-FDP fighters killed their husbands or abducted them because their sons or husbands had joined M23.

A 35-year-old woman said that a CMC-FDP commander and six fighters came to her house in Kyahemba, a village in Bukombo, in November 2025. She said that the commander entered the house and asked her: "Did you allow your child to be recruited [by M23]?" The woman said that her 15-year-old son had left without warning earlier that month to join M23. "I said I didn't know how he was recruited. Then he started shooting my husband." She said that her husband was shot three times in the chest in front his 8-year-old and 6-year-old children. The woman was later told that her son had died while a member of M23.

According to four victims and information from a human rights defender, a CMC-FDP commander based in Kyahemba was involved in the detention or killing of their loved ones.

Another woman, Elisabeth*, said that six CMC-FDP fighters, four of whom were former neighbours, came to her house in November 2025, looking for her husband. "They told us to leave the house. They said, 'you collaborate with the (M23) ... They acted like [my husband] was in cahoots with the M23. They shot him three times, in the chest and in the

genitals. After they shot him, they looted the house. They left with four goats, clothing, and cooking pots.”

In its response to Amnesty International, CMC-FDP did not specify any measures it has taken to investigate the allegations that its fighters killed civilians. It asserted that they did not have enough information to conduct investigations.

Extortion and threats

Prior to the arrival of M23 in the area, CMC-FDP collected money from residents, a form of tax known as *lala salama* (sleep peacefully in Swahili). These “taxes” were ostensibly meant to finance the protection of civilians. One victim said her husband joined M23 because he was tired of the extortion.

Innocent*, who worked in Kyahemba, said that after his son joined M23 in August 2025, CMC-FDP fighters approached him three times and asked for money because his son joined the group. He paid them US\$300. “Each time, they said to bring my son to join their group. I said, it’s not me who took him there. How am I going to find him? Each time they came, they hit me. They burned three homes, mine and two others. They said if I don’t give them money, they would kill me.”

Justine*, a 20-year-old woman, said that her husband fled in July or August last year without telling her. In September, fighters from CMC-FDP came to her house. “I look like a Tutsi. [CMC-FDP fighters] forced open the door, entered and whipped me once on my backside and once on the chest. They tied up my hands. They told me, ‘tell us where your husband is’.” When she said she didn’t know, they told her they would take her to one of CMC-FDP’s military commanders, who, they intimidated, would force her to reveal her husband’s whereabouts.

While on her way to the commander, one of the fighters helped her escape. “I was carrying a baby, and the fighter had sympathy for the baby. He said, ‘if you go that way, they are going to kill you’.”

Justine believed her husband joined M23 out of fear. She said that in July or August, M23 told her husband: “(You) are Rwandan Tutsi, and all Tutsi who don’t join the M23 will be decapitated.”

CMC-FDP wrote that “CMC-FDP has no policy or practice of demanding ransoms or payments from relatives of those who have joined the M23 or any other opposing movement. If isolated cases of behaviour contrary to our principles existed, we would be the first to want to know who the offenders are so that appropriate measures can be taken in accordance with disciplinary rules and the requirements of justice.”

CMC-FDP leaders should have known that cases of extortion and ransom were taking place and had the responsibility to investigate them and hold fighters involved accountable. If they knew these actions were taking places and failed to stop them, they could be complicit in the abuses.

Congolese army's support for CMC-FDP

In May 2023, the DRC government passed a [law](#) creating a Reserve Defence Army that integrated certain local armed groups, including the CMC-FDP, into the Congolese army, creating a proxy force to support the fight against M23.

FARDC supports the armed groups financially and with weapons and ammunition. The DRC's finance minister [told](#) the National Assembly's Defence and Security Committee in December 2025 that the state pays Wazalendo groups [US\\$4 million per month](#).

According to an [internal document](#) from the North Kivu military government obtained by Ebuteli, a Congolese research group, CMC-FDP received more than 100,000 rounds of ammunition and more than 100 40mm rockets from the FARDC in late 2023 and early 2024.

In July 2024, the European Union [sanctioned](#) CMC-FDP's top commander, Dominique "Domi" Kamanzi Ndaruhutse for "committing acts that constitute serious human rights violations and abuses." He has fought with various *Nyatura* (Kinyarwanda for "hit hard") groups for more than 10 years and has, according to the UN group of experts on DRC, collaborated with the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), particularly in Rutshuru's Bwito area. The FDLR are an armed opposition group operating in eastern DRC composed of Rwandan and Congolese fighters, containing remnants of the Interahamwe and former Rwandan soldiers responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide, as well as fighters not involved in the genocide.

"It is inexcusable that the Congolese army continues to support CMC-FDP fighters despite their appalling abuses against civilians," said Tigere Chagutah. "The group's abuses have gone unabated for years. The Congolese government must immediately end its support and collaboration with CMC-FDP and other abusive Wazalendo groups and hold them accountable."

* Pseudonyms are used to protect identities of interviewees for security and confidentiality reasons.

