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The year 2012 saw an upsurge in fighting in eastern DRC; in November the UN reported an increase from 1.7 to 2.24 million internally displaced people over the year. An additional 70,000 people fled into Rwanda or Uganda.

Despite vast wealth in resources, the DRC ranks last out of 187 countries under the UNDP Human Development Index. The root cause of its misery is ongoing conflict and the state of humanitarian crisis it creates. This results in the highest rate of malnutrition in central and west Africa, affecting 43 per cent of children under five according to UNICEF. Treatable infectious diseases such as malaria, diarrhoea and acute respiratory ailments have become the most common causes of death for this age group.

A regional MDG update indicated that the DRC was one of the four African countries – all in or post-conflict – with the highest infant mortality rates; and one of the eight in the region – again all in or post-conflict – with the highest maternal mortality rates. It was one of only seven African countries where immunization coverage declined between 1990 and 2010.

The year 2012 saw health emergencies such as an outbreak of Ebola fever in Orientale province and an ongoing cholera epidemic.

HIV is also a serious issue, in part due to the high incidence of sexual violence in conflict areas. The DRC, one of UNAIDS' 22 priority countries, was reported to have achieved 'slow or no decline' in new HIV infections among children between 2009 and 2011 (MDG 6).

In October, Dr Denis Mukwege, founder of Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, South Kivu, was temporarily forced into exile after narrowly escaping an attack by armed men outside his home. Dr Mukwege has become an international spokesperson against conflict in the DRC over the course of a career treating tens of thousands of women victims of sexual violence.

Indigenous groups such as Batwa faced difficulties with regard to health care; as conflict spread, discrimination and marginalization made it particularly difficult for them to access emergency humanitarian aid.

Upsurge in conflict

In April members of the armed group National Council for the Defence of the People (CNDP), which had integrated into the national army after a 2009 peace deal, mutinied. Some of them were led by Bosco Ntaganda, against whom the ICC issued arrest warrants in 2006 and 2012 for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes. The mutineers subsequently formed themselves into the armed group M23.

In November M23 took the city of Goma in North Kivu, withdrawing in December to begin negotiations with the DRC government in Uganda.

During the course of the year's confrontations, both M23 rebels and army soldiers reportedly committed mass violations and war crimes, including summary execution and rape, against the civilian population.

According to the UN and other sources, the M23 is directly backed by the Rwandan and Ugandan governments, although both reject these allegations.

In the security vacuum formed in eastern DRC as some soldiers and police deserted to join the M23 and the remainder focused on fighting the new threat, existing armed groups have gained ground, at times carrying out ethnically motivated attacks in areas newly under their control.

The UN reported that at least 264 civilians were killed in more than 75 attacks on villages in Masisi, North Kivu between April and September. The attacks were said to have been committed along real or perceived ethnic lines, with the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and Mayi-Mayi Nyatura militia targeting civilians they considered to support the rival Mayi-Mayi Raia Mutomboki group, and the latter targeting ethnic Hutus they suspected of sympathizing with the FDLR.

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