

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Democratic Republic of the Congo



Risk Level: Current Crisis

Various armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo recurrently and indiscriminately attack populations, committing violations that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

BACKGROUND:

Attacks by armed groups and recurring inter-communal violence have threatened populations in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for more than 30 years. Over 120 militias and armed groups operate in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika provinces, many regularly perpetrating widespread violations that may amount to [crimes against humanity and war crimes](#). The UN Security Council (UNSC)-mandated Panel of Experts (PoE) has documented cases of armed groups allegedly executing, torturing and arbitrarily detaining civilians perceived as collaborators of rival forces. While conducting operations against these groups, government forces (FARDC) and police have also been implicated in violations of International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including sexual violence, torture and arbitrary killings, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Despite repeated offensives by the FARDC, supported by the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO), violence in the east has steadily escalated in recent years amid intensified activity by groups such as the March 23 Movement (M23), Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), Cooperative for the Development of Congo (CODECO) and the Democratic Forces for the

Liberation of Rwanda, among others. This sustained insecurity has driven a sharp increase in conflict-related sexual violence and grave violations against children. It has also fueled a deepening displacement crisis, with over 7.8 million people internally displaced, including 5.3 million in eastern DRC. Displacement sites themselves are frequently attacked, killing hundreds of civilians and causing widespread cases of multiple displacement.

Since its re-emergence in 2021, M23 has conducted extensive operations across North and South Kivu, clashing with the FARDC and Wazalendo, a government-backed militia. In early 2025, M23 intensified its offensive in North and South Kivu capturing key cities, including Goma and Bukavu, and consolidating control over mineral-rich areas, while increasing attacks on civilian areas. The PoE and UN Human Rights Council (HRC)-mandated Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) have documented evidence of support to M23 by the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF), including the presence of an estimated 3,000-4,000 troops operating alongside the group. In 2025 the FFM concluded that all parties to the conflict – namely M23, RDF, FARDC, Wazalendo and affiliated groups – have perpetrated violations that may constitute war crimes and/or crimes against humanity. M23 allegedly committed torture, sexual violence and enforced disappearances, while the FARDC, Wazalendo and allied militias were responsible for deliberate killings of civilians, widespread sexual violence, looting and the forcible recruitment and use of children.

In response to the deteriorating situation in North and South Kivu, in February 2025 the HRC established the FFM and later authorized a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) to investigate serious violations of IHRL and IHL committed since January 2022. Separately, the International Criminal Court, which has been investigating serious crimes in the DRC since 2004, opened a new preliminary examination in June 2023 into alleged crimes committed in North Kivu since January 2022, following a request from the Congolese government.

As the conflict escalated, international pressure on M23 and Rwanda increased throughout 2025. Qatar-mediated talks between the DRC government and M23 culminated in the Doha Framework for Peace in November. In December 2025 the DRC and Rwanda reaffirmed the United States (US)-brokered Washington Accords, originally signed on 27 June, committing to cease hostilities in North and South Kivu, respect territorial integrity and end support for non-state armed groups. Despite these efforts, the security situation remains highly volatile as the peace agreements have largely stalled.

On 19 December 2025 the UNSC extended MONUSCO's mandate for another year, maintaining its presence in North Kivu and Ituri while allowing for potential deployment linked to ceasefire monitoring in South Kivu, subject to security conditions and Council notification. The decision followed a reassessment of MONUSCO's exit strategy in light of the rapidly deteriorating protection environment. MONUSCO had withdrawn from South Kivu in June 2024 under an agreed disengagement plan, after the Congolese government requested an accelerated exit in 2023.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS:

Violence in eastern DRC continues to intensify amid persistent clashes and attacks by armed groups. With FARDC forces redeployed to counter M23, other armed groups, particularly the ADF and CODECO, have exploited the security vacuum. In one of the deadliest incidents, on 28 April CODECO-affiliated fighters attacked villages near Pimbo in

Djugu territory, Ituri, killing at least 69 people, mostly civilians. Earlier that day, the Convention for the Popular Revolution (CRP) reportedly attacked an FARDC regimental headquarters, triggering further clashes between CRP and CODECO forces. In response, MONUSCO deployed patrols and evacuated civilians caught in the crossfire. In a string of attacks across Ituri and North Kivu, ADF militants killed at least 70 people between April and June.

The security situation in North and South Kivu has been further destabilized by the growing use of drones by the FARDC and M23 rebels. Since the beginning of 2026, the deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles has contributed to rising civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. Although M23 partially withdrew from key positions in South Kivu in mid-May amid pressure and ongoing ceasefire discussions, the situation is fluid and territorial control remains contested. In early July the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights condemned an increase in hostilities between the FARDC and M23 in South Kivu's Fizi and Mwenga territories, with both sides using armed drones, heavy artillery and other explosive weapons in civilian-populated areas.

An Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC has further underscored the urgency of securing a ceasefire in conflict-affected areas, as ongoing insecurity hampers containment efforts, restricts humanitarian access and increases the risk of wider transmission among already vulnerable and displaced populations.

ANALYSIS:

For decades, armed groups in eastern DRC have exploited weak state presence to carry out attacks against civilians. Rampant impunity and competition for control of profitable minerals have enabled the proliferation of such groups. Ethnically motivated violence, including against displaced populations, has led to repeated cycles of displacement, while sexual violence continues to be used as a weapon of war. Persistent insecurity and armed group activity have impeded MONUSCO's ability to protect civilians and deliver life-saving assistance.

The M23 crisis has heightened the risk of further atrocities and fueled hate speech, discrimination and regional instability. The presence of the FARDC-aligned Wazalendo with documented records of abuse further exacerbates protection risks, including potential state responsibility when violations are not prevented or addressed.

Neither a military solution or the current peace agreements on the M23 crisis will, on their own, resolve the political, social and economic drivers of conflict in the eastern provinces, such as illegal resource exploitation and ethnic grievances, nor will they end ethnically motivated attacks. The US-mediated peace deal offers a rare diplomatic opening, but it lacks key commitments to justice, accountability and redress. In parallel with the ceasefire agreement, a strategic partnership agreement between the US and DRC, which includes provisions on critical minerals access and cooperation, risks replicating extractive dynamics that have fueled conflict in eastern DRC.

RISK ASSESSMENT:

- - - Continuous hostilities inflicting large-scale civilian casualties and destruction of critical infrastructure.
 - Armed groups consolidating political and economic authority amid unprecedented illegal mining exploitation and cross-border smuggling.
 - Widespread conflict-related sexual violence, disproportionately impacting displaced women and girls.
 - Escalating child recruitment and use by myriad armed actors.
 - An existing security vacuum in eastern DRC emboldening other armed groups to remobilize and target civilians.

NECESSARY ACTION:

All forces operating in the DRC must prioritize civilian protection and compliance with IHL and IHRL. The FARDC should implement a vetting process to identify and provisionally remove individuals implicated in serious human rights violations, and cease using abusive militias as proxy forces. The FARDC and police should thoroughly investigate and publicly report on any violations by their forces. Rwanda should end its military support for M23 and respect the DRC's territorial integrity.

The international community should suspend military assistance to governments backing armed groups, ensure that any support – financial or otherwise – does not fuel human rights abuses and intensify pressure on all parties to halt support for armed actors, guarantee humanitarian access and commit to genuine peace efforts. Accountability must be central to international efforts to address the crisis. Guarantors of the Washington Accords must take concrete action to enforce compliance with IHL and IHRL.

Any mineral trade deal must prioritize human rights, civilian protection and environmental safeguards, as well as strengthen supply chain due diligence and ensure equitable benefit-sharing.

