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HEAVY LOSSES FOR THE FARDC *MONTHLY REPORT N° 31 - MAY 2020*

125 violent deaths (↑47% from April 2020)
103 people abducted or kidnapped (↓19%)
65 clashes (↑5%)

The number of civilians killed by armed actors increased significantly in May with 125 people killed compared to the 85 people killed in April. This toll is substantially higher than the monthly average of 92 deaths since

June 2017.

About half of these victims were killed in attacks allegedly led by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Beni territory in North Kivu. It has been five months since the start of major operations by DRC Armed Forces (FARDC) against the ADF, yet the ADF continues to commit large-scale abuses.

The second most affected territory was Masisi in North Kivu, with 19 deaths. In this territory, a coalition led by the People's Alliance for a Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS) carried out an intense guerilla campaign against the Nduma Defense of Congo-Rénové (NDC-R), the dominant group in the area. This conflict has led to many deaths among the civilian population.

Relatively fewer civilian deaths were recorded in the territories of Fizi and Mwenga, in South Kivu, but very violent clashes took place between the FARDC and the Twirwaneho militias¹. There is a fear that the violence between community militias, already frequent in the area, is entering an even more heightened phase.

The FARDC suffered very heavy losses over the course of this month: at least 56 soldiers were killed in 37 clashes recorded by KST. Two incidents accounted for most of these deaths: [the ADF attack on the FARDC in Otokaka-Makembi, in Beni](#)

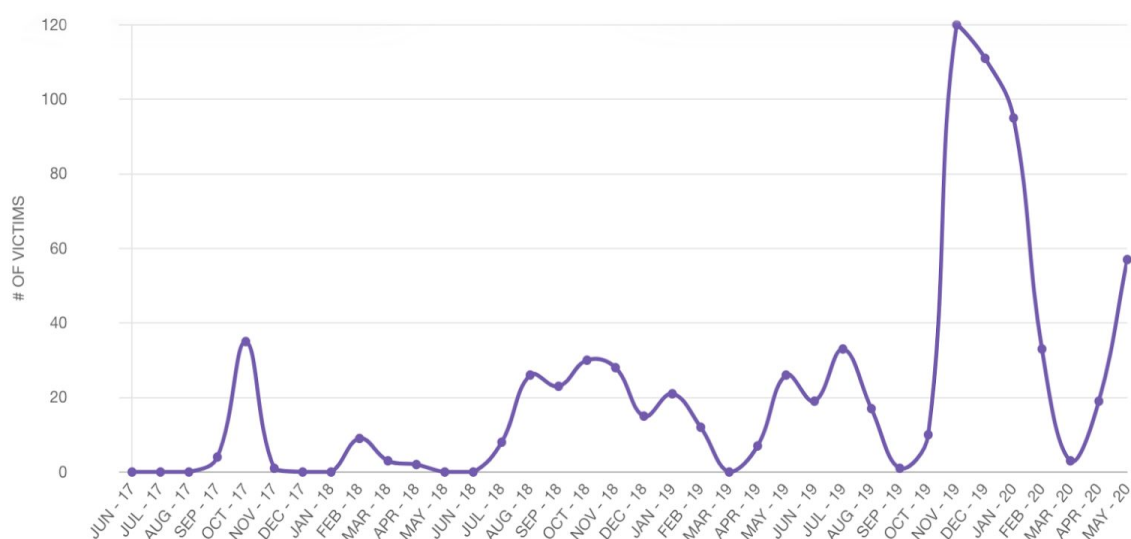
¹ Twirwaneho means "let's defend ourselves" in Kinyamulenge

[territory](#) on May 27 (23 soldiers killed) and the [Twirwaneho attack in Kakenge, Kalongi, Kabingo and Madegu](#) on May 23 (21 soldiers killed). Five FARDC soldiers were also killed by their fellow soldiers.

Beni: New Wave of Killings

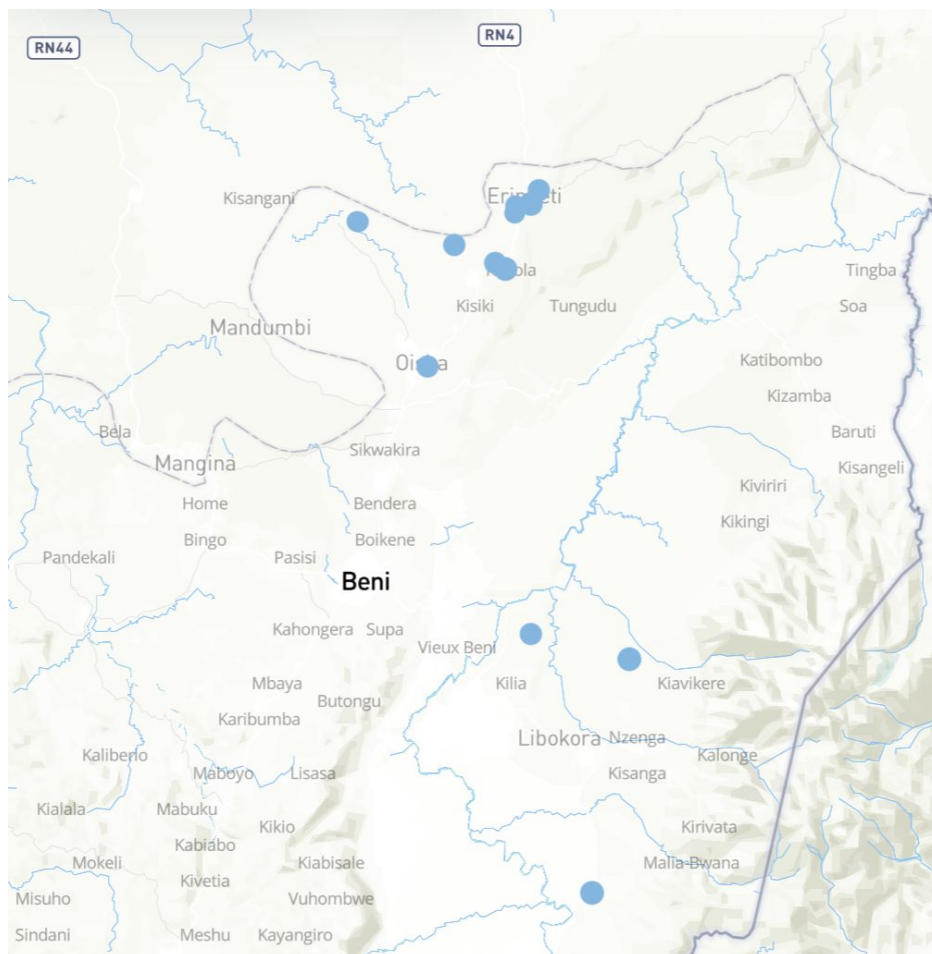
In May, there was a net increase of civilian killings by armed actors in the Beni territory: 64 were killed, compared to 23 the previous month. This increase is twice the average number of killings in the territory since KST began collecting such data in June 2017.

The vast majority of victims (57) were killed during attacks by the ADF. After three months of relative calm, this Ugandan Islamist group has since resumed killing on a large scale.



Number of civilians killed during attacks attributed to the ADF by month

Most of these killings took place in the Eringeti region, in the northeast of the territory, close to the border with Ituri, a province in which at least 30 civilians have also been killed in attacks attributed to the ADF.



Location of the killings attributed to the ADF in Beni territory in May 2020

These killings suggest that most of the ADF survived the FARDC offensive launched in October 2019 and managed to retreat, particularly to the Ituri region. The Congolese Minister of Defense, Aimé Ngoi Mukena, partly recognized this in a document addressed in response to questions from parliamentarians, dated June 4, 2020. He states:

"The routed ADF terrorists have gone into hiding in the Virunga National Park, from where they venture out to retaliate against the civilian populations and isolated soldiers, particularly in Eringeti (...) and Halungupa (...). In their flight, some ADF members have gone to Ituri province, more specifically (...) Mambasa and Irumu territories."

Although the minister has also claimed that [the FARDC is neither weak nor tired](#) (in French), the increase in attacks attributed to the ADF could be explained by the easing of Congolese army operations.

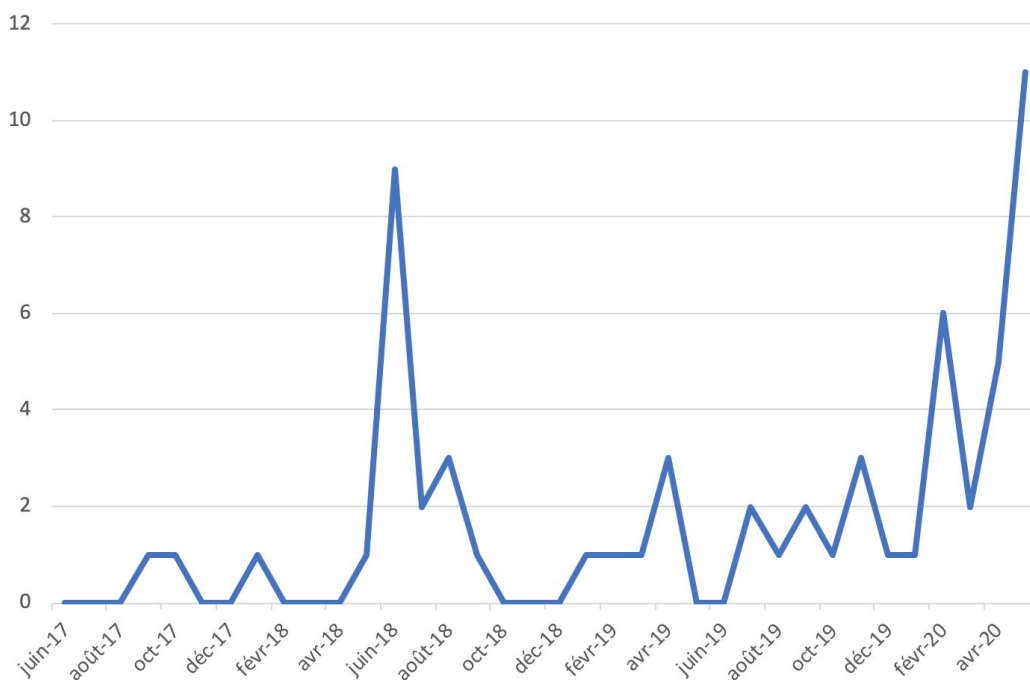
Of the four clashes between the FARDC and the ADF recorded in May by KST, only one was initiated by the FARDC. The ADF attacks, on the other hand, were extremely deadly: the FARDC, for example, lost 23 men (compared to the seven among ADF ranks) in [Otokaka-Makembi on May 27](#). An internal FARDC investigation has been opened to analyze the defeat.

According to several military sources on the ground, troop morale is low, particularly due to [the misappropriation of bonuses intended for the FARDC](#). According to the Ministry of Defense, a disciplinary board has been established to prosecute the “commander of the third defense zone,” General Fall Sikabwe, and a judicial inquiry has been opened against “the accounting officer of the Beni garrison” to shed light on the issue.

Furthermore, part of the FARDC troops in Beni have been redeployed to Djugu territory in Ituri, where the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CODECO) and its different factions have been carrying out [repeated massacres](#) since the start of the year.

Butembo: Record Crime Rates

In May, record levels of armed robberies were reported in the town of Butembo, including 11 incidents.



Number of armed robberies by month in Butembo

These reports are unprecedented in comparison with the data KST has been collecting since June 2017. This data is well above the recorded average in this town (1.7 armed robberies per month).

This upsurge can be partly explained by the economic crisis caused by the response to the coronavirus. In April, regional trade suffered from the three-week long restriction of movement between towns in North Kivu and travel to neighboring Uganda has been banned since March.

Also, since March, the World Health Organization (WHO) has stopped financing Congolese security forces (i.e. the FARDC and the Congolese National Police and the National Intelligence Agency), which it was assisting in the Ebola virus response. The upswing in armed robberies could be a delayed reaction to the end of such funding.

At least one civilian was killed during the armed robberies in Butembo. Civilians were also seen violently retaliating against the alleged armed robbers, at least two of whom were lynched by civilians.

Masisi: Guerilla against the NDC-R

Clashes in the Masisi territory escalated considerably in the month of May; KST recorded 15 compared to eight in April.

The vast majority of these clashes took place between the NDC-R and the coalition formed between the APCLS, the Nyatura of the Alliance populaire pour la revendication des droits humains au Congo (APRDC), and sometimes the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR-Foca), as well as other Nyatura groups.

The APCLS coalition seems to have adopted a guerilla-type tactic to weaken the NDC-R: they regularly ambush the NDC-R and attack their most vulnerable positions in order to burn them before withdrawing.

This tactic has allowed the coalition to kill 30 NDC-R combatants (compared to 18 deaths among APCLS ranks). However, to date, this tactic has not enabled them to definitively acquire NDC-R positions.

This conflict continues to increase the number of civilian victims, killed either during the fighting or after being suspected of collaborating with the enemy. KST recorded the deaths of 19 civilians in May compared to 16 in April.

Lubero-Rutshuru: “Real-Fake” Surrenders

On May 18th, a dozen armed groups, including the Forces patriotiques populaires - Armée du peuple (FPP-AP) of Kabidon, which according to their chiefs, accounts for some 2,500 combatants, [announced their surrender in Lubero](#) (in French).

Similarly, the self-proclaimed General Kakule Sikuli Lafontaine, a veteran of armed movements in Lubero territory, and “Je t’aime,” a Mai-Mai commander operating in Rutshuru territory, officially laid down their arms in Goma on May 4. However, Lafontaine was said to be “in declining health” and had “few troops” in a [recent report by the Congo Research Group](#). As for “Je t’aime,” he had already officially surrendered in March 2020, along with 200 other men, about half of which were actually teenagers kidnapped a few days before ([see the March Report](#)).

Additionally, several of “Je t’aime” men remained close to Nyamilima and Buramba (Rutshuru) under the command of Roger Magumu.

Kalehe: Security Vacuum

Sixteen incidents were recorded in May, a notable increase compared to nine in April. Rwandan Hutu rebels of the National Congress of Resistance for Democracy (CNRD) resurfaced in order to carry out several civilian killings (four killed in Chinono on May 5) for the first time since January. This shows that the group has not been completely dismantled, despite [the major operation led by the FARDC and the Rwandan army last December and January](#).

The end of this large movement and the later redeployment of part of FARDC troops to Fizi and Uvira territories in April seems to have signaled a green light to several other groups, such as the Raia Mutomboki Bipopa, Butachibera, Hamakombo, and Blaise, to take possession of vast areas. Blaise appears to have recruited some Maheshe troops which, unlike Maheshe, refused to surrender.

Walungu: Maheshe Surrenders

On May 20, Chief Raia Mutomboki Maheshe surrendered himself in Chishadu along with 120 of his men. This surrender seems to have been prompted because of Kabi Kiriza Ephraïm’s promotion from Brigadier General to Chief of Staff of the Republican Guard in Kinshasa the month before. Both men come from the Bashi community. The Mwami (tribal chief) of Ngweshe Pierre Ndatabaye Weza III, also from the Bashi tribe, played a role mediating the surrender. [MONUSCO also took part, in particular, by disarming the combatants](#).

Kabare: End of the Line for Chance

Chance Mihonya, the leader of an armed group who claims to defend the interests of the Batwa (Pygmy) community, was arrested along with four of his men on May 23 in Kabushwa by rangers of the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature

(ICCN). Chance's group was illicitly operating mines in the Kahuzi-Biega National Park. He was [weakened in April](#) by a split within his group.

Shabunda: Forces of Law and Disorder

The security situation overall remained stable in May (four incidents recorded compared to three in April). However, law enforcement agencies continued to commit abuses. FARDC troops of the 3403rd regiment reportedly used force to racket civilians, forcing them to transport goods and build shelters for them.

Also, in the Wakabango chiefdom, members of the Congolese National Police (CNP) worked hand in hand with the Raia Mutomboki of Makindu to rob travelers on the road to Kamituga (in Mwenga territory). Six police officers were arrested.

Mwenga-Fizi: Dangerous Descent

The security situation worsened in the highlands of Fizi and Mwenga in May. This decline in security may mark a turning point in [this crisis which has been ongoing for over a year](#).

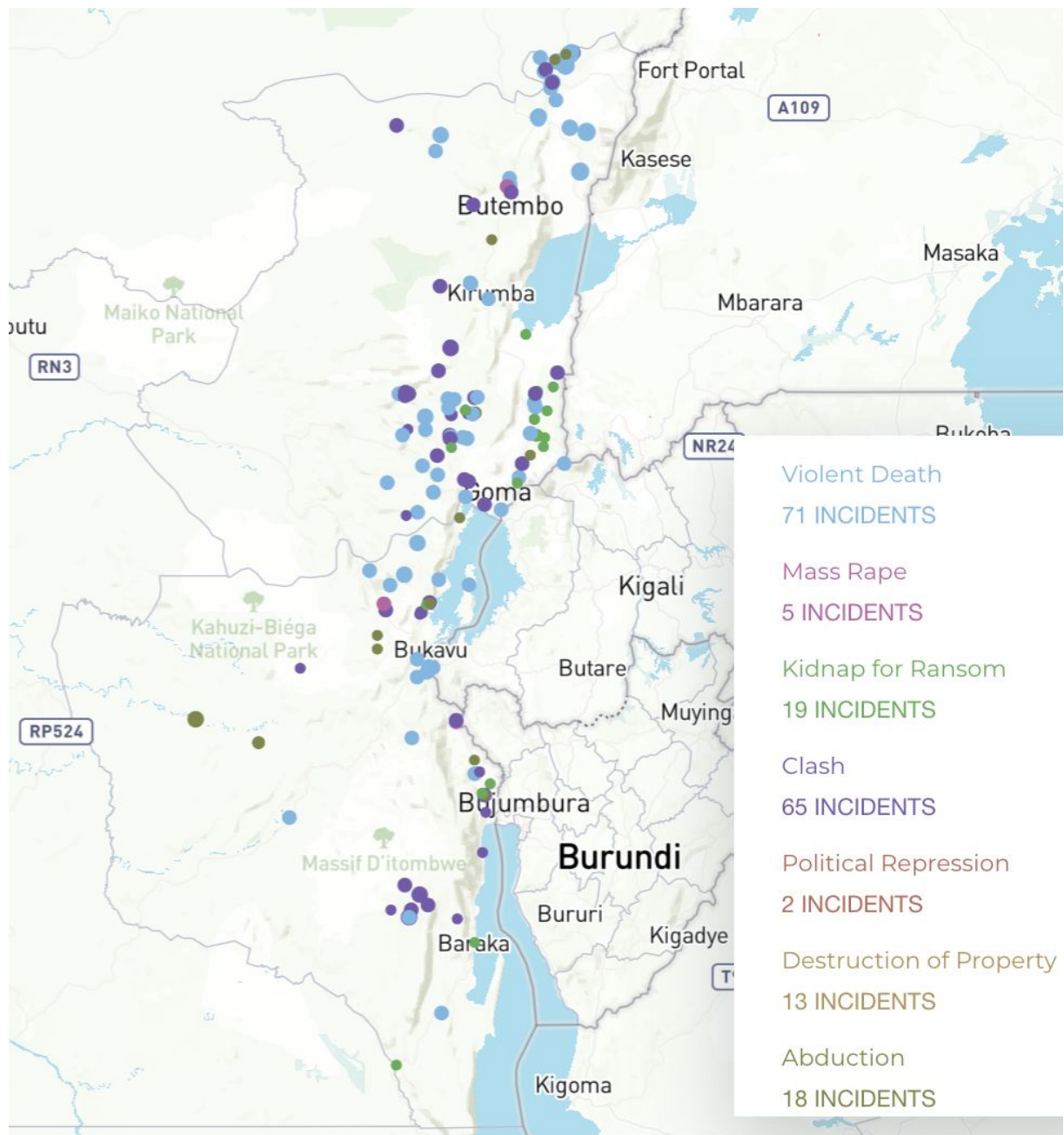
Until now, most of the clashes occurred between armed groups from the Banyamulenge community and those from other communities living in the highlands (Babembe, Bafuliru and Banyindu), leading to many abuses against civilians. The FARDC, in particular, was accused of remaining passive.

However, the clash of May 24, in Kakenge, Kalongi, Kabingo and Madegu, seems to have changed everything: following an incident involving the FARDC, accused of looting civilian Banyamulenge field crops, 21 soldiers were killed by Banyamulenge militia members.

In January, FARDC leadership began to take notice of Colonel Michel Rukunda, also known as Makanika, after he refused to participate in the "self-defense" of the Banyamulenge community. This former professional army officer's group is becoming increasingly visible in the fighting and seems to be relatively well organized.

This event seems to have made Makanika and the Banyamulenge militias FARDC's number one enemy. Furthermore, the Mai-Mai Biloze Bishambuke militias continue to target Makanika's group. Thirteen members of this group were killed in an ambush by the Mai-Mai on May 31st in Kangwa, Cakira, Kamombo, Karunga and Kabara.

In total, 14 incidents were recorded in Fizi and Mwenga territories in May (compared to 11 the previous month), including 9 clashes (compared to 5 in April) mostly in the highlands.



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The Kivu Security Tracker (KST) is a joint project of the Congo Research Group, based at New York University's Center on International Cooperation, and Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch provides training and other support to KST researchers but does not independently verify all incidents reported on the KST and does not necessarily support all the views expressed by the KST.