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## HRW – Human Rights Watch (Author)

### DR Congo: Rwanda-backed M23 Executed Civilians in Goma

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Mass Killings in February Highlight Grave Risks to People in Occupied Areas

(Nairobi) – The [Rwanda](#)-backed M23 armed group summarily executed at least 21 civilians and most likely many more in Goma, eastern [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), on February 22-23, 2025, Human Rights Watch said today.

The M23 has occupied Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, since January 27, 2025. Witnesses said that on the afternoon of February 22, at least three pickup trucks carrying dozens of M23 fighters arrived at various parts of Goma's Kasika neighborhood. They executed seven people west of Katindo military camp, a former Congolese army barracks. The bodies of 11 more people, including a boy, were found at a construction site near the camp. On February 23, the fighters rounded up people, including to forcibly recruit them, and killed three men as they tried to escape.

"The M23's brutal control over Goma has created a climate of fear among those perceived to be allied to the Congolese government," said [Clémentine de Montjoye](#), senior Great Lakes researcher at Human Rights Watch. "The mass killings don't seem to be actions by rogue fighters, but rather the M23 leadership's efforts to solidify their control by whatever means necessary."

The absence of reports of fighting between the warring parties and the nature of the wounds indicate that M23 fighters deliberately executed

those in their custody, which are war crimes, Human Rights Watch said.

Between February and May, Human Rights Watch remotely interviewed 22 people, including witnesses to the killings, victims' relatives, and medical workers, among others. Researchers reviewed [media reports](#), and geolocated and analyzed photographs and videos sent directly by sources or found on social media. On May 23, Human Rights Watch contacted Lawrence Kanyuka, spokesperson for the M23's allied Alliance Fleuve Congo, but received no response.

Human Rights Watch received credible information that the M23 was drawn to the Kasika neighborhood because of reports of crime and activity by the Congolese army and the "Wazalendo," militia groups aligned with the Congolese government. M23 fighters searched houses and local businesses for young men. "They started shooting and took around 25 people from the streets," said a resident of an area close to Katindo camp, whose 25-year-old relative was killed that day.

Human Rights Watch confirmed that M23 fighters executed seven people on streets close to Katindo camp and received credible reports of dozens more killings. "[The M23] went into stores and shot people in the head on the Avenue du Commandant Belge," said a witness. "The bodies were then piled up in two places: 10 in one place and 15 in another." Residents described seeing over a dozen bodies on Kasika Avenue. "[The M23] showed me the bodies of people on the ground and said: 'This is what we're going to do with you,'" said a woman whose relative was taken away. "I saw 18 bodies; others were on other streets."

Eleven bodies were found at a construction site less than 100 meters from the camp, based on witness accounts and geolocated and verified videos and photographs. Human Rights Watch verified the identities of six victims, all civilians and neighborhood residents.

The relative of a victim taken from their house said: "The M23 walked off with him, and the next morning we found his body in the construction site with other bodies." A relative and a neighbor of a 15-year-old boy said that the M23 took him and executed him, and dumped his body in the construction site with the others.

Photographs and videos show several bullet holes and blood on the wall on the execution site, as well as items on the ground that appear to be bullet cases, indicating that some of the victims were shot there. The Independent Forensic Expert Group of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims estimates less than 24 hours had passed since the people were killed and photographed, matching witness accounts. A photograph posted to Facebook at 10:13 p.m. local time on February 22, taken during daylight hours, indicates the victims were killed sometime before nightfall, at 6:40 p.m. on February 22.

On February 22, M23 fighters shot three people on a street just west of Kasika. "When we arrived, my friend and two others were still breathing," said a friend of a victim. "The M23 refused to let us approach them and fired into the ground. When [my friend] died, they agreed to let us take him to the morgue." Human Rights Watch geolocated a video shared by a resident showing one of the bodies being loaded onto a truck on Mulongwe Avenue, west of the neighborhood. The witness said he saw six other bodies on that street.

Human Rights Watch also geolocated and verified a video showing men rounded up by M23 fighters on February 23 near a sports field commonly known as "terrain des scouts." "We saw the M23 take around 20 people and make them sit on the ground," said a witness. "They started intimidating them – they were youth from the neighborhood, but they accused them of being FARDC [Congolese army]. At least three people tried to run away but were shot dead." An independent source corroborated that men trying to escape were killed, but could not verify the victims' identities.

The video shows an M23 fighter with a red arm band, believed to belong to the military police unit. The detained men were driven away in a truck, according to a witness. A resident and an independent source said they believed the men were being forcibly recruited.

Three medical workers said that over 50 bodies were collected from the Kasika area on February 22 and 23, which matches information provided by residents and others. Human Rights Watch verified the identities of 13 victims. Many of those killed had a gunshot wound to the head or chest, based on witness accounts.

Commanders and combatants who directly ordered or carried out abuses should be held criminally accountable, Human Rights Watch said. Military commanders and civilian officials can also be held criminally liable for crimes committed by their subordinates if they knew or should have known of crimes being committed and failed to prevent or punish the crimes.

The fighting in eastern Congo between the M23 and Rwandan forces against the Congolese military and allied armed groups has exposed civilians to serious crimes by all parties to the conflict, including summary killings, sexual violence, forced displacement, and pillage.

In October 2024, the International Criminal Court prosecutor [announced](#) that his office would renew investigative efforts in Congo with a focus on crimes in North Kivu since January 2022. The court's investigation should include the executions of civilians in Goma by M23 fighters, Human Rights Watch said.

“The Rwandan government, as the direct supporter of the M23, may be complicit in the armed group’s war crimes,” de Montjoye said. “Concerned governments, including those attempting to broker peace deals between the warring parties, should press Rwanda to end its support and ensure that justice for serious crimes is a priority.”

## Associated documents

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3 June 2025 | [HRW – Human Rights Watch](#) (Author)

Congo, Democratic Republic

**North Kivu province: M23 militia summarily executed at least 21 civilians in Goma on 22 and 23 February 2025**

[RD Congo : Le M23, soutenu par le Rwanda, a exécuté des civils à Goma](#) (Appeal or News Release, French)

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