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Report of the fact-finding mission on the situation in North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo*, **

Summary

The present report is submitted to the Human Rights Council pursuant to resolution S-37/1, in which the Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish a fact-finding mission to investigate alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law and potential international crimes in the context of the most recent escalation of hostilities in North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The mission concludes that, between January and July 2025, all parties to the conflict committed serious human rights violations and abuses that may constitute crimes under international law and recommends the prompt establishment of the commission of inquiry mandated in the same Council resolution.

* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.

** The annexes to the present report are circulated as received, in the language of submission only.

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I. Introduction

1. On 7 February 2025, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution S-37/1, requesting the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to urgently establish a fact-finding mission mandated, inter alia, to investigate and establish the facts, circumstances and root causes of all the alleged violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law and potential international crimes committed in the context of the recent escalation of hostilities in North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

II. Scope, methodology and standard of proof

2. The fact-finding mission operated from the United Nations Regional Service Centre in Entebbe, Uganda, and conducted missions to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi between March and August 2025. The mission thanks the Governments of those countries for their cooperation. Regrettably, the mission was not granted access to refugee sites in Uganda, with the national authorities citing security concerns. The leaders of Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) also denied the mission access to Goma and it could therefore not visit areas controlled by M23.

3. Despite those restrictions, the fact-finding mission conducted over 280 interviews with victims and witnesses – 170 men and 110 women, including a number of gender-diverse persons –, as well as meetings with representatives of civil society, national authorities and non-governmental and international organizations, both in person and remotely. It also received submissions from 317 individuals, groups and organizations on alleged human rights violations and abuses. The team preserved and reviewed more than 1,500 original and open-source photos and videos related to alleged violations of international law.

4. The mission rigorously assessed the credibility of each source and verified the validity and consistency of the information provided, in accordance with the methodology of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Only findings meeting the threshold of "reasonable grounds to believe" were included in the report. The mission applied a victim-centred approach and took all measures possible to mitigate the risk of reprisals against individuals engaging with it.

5. Given the time constraints and to prioritize the most urgent protection concerns, the mission focused on identifying patterns of violations and abuses in the context of the escalation of hostilities between January and July 2025. The mission's work is also intended to serve as a foundation for the commission of inquiry mandated in resolution S-37/1 to conduct comprehensive investigations into events since 2022. The mission shared advance versions of the report with the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and of Rwanda for factual comments. Both responded with comments, which the mission reviewed and considered.

III. Context

A. Background: reemergence of Mouvement du 23 mars in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (2021–2024)

6. In November 2021, eight years after having been initially defeated, M23 launched several attacks in North Kivu, citing the stalled implementation of the 2013 Nairobi declarations,[1] especially those on demobilization and reintegration,[2] and the need to protect Banyamulenge and other Kinyarwanda-speaking communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

[1] S/2013/740.
[2] S/2022/479, para. 69.

7. By the end of 2024, M23 and its political platform Alliance Fleuve Congo (AFC) had expanded control over the Rutshuru and Nyiragongo territories and most of Masisi, including mining areas, with reports of serious human rights abuses and international humanitarian law violations occurring.[3]

8. Since 2022, several United Nations reports[4] have pointed to Rwanda actively supporting M23 through recruitment, training and the provision of equipment as a means to protect what it perceives as its national security – particularly against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), an armed group partly composed of former Rwandan soldiers and Hutu militias, and its economic interests. The Government of Rwanda has consistently denied allegations of direct involvement with M23,[5] including in its response to the present report.

9. In response to M23 advances, Congolese authorities issued calls for armed mobilization in late 2022,[6] prompting the mass mobilization of Congolese youth and also inspiring dozens of armed groups to rebrand collectively as Wazalendo ("patriots") or Volontaires pour la défense de la Patrie, aligning in the fight against M23. The Government sought to formalize that mobilization through the creation of the Réserve armée de défense[7] and by arming and financing Wazalendo and other allied armed groups, including FDLR,[8] so that they could conduct joint operations with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC). Wazalendo groups,[9] however, mostly remained outside of effective State control.[10]

10. The Congolese authorities' recognition of and military support to Wazalendo and allied armed groups – including some with leaders known to be responsible for serious human rights violations and abuses[11] – contributed to further violations and abuses and seriously undermined accountability efforts. Furthermore, that active support and the participation of FDLR elements in FARDC operations against M23 exacerbated tensions with Rwanda. The involvement of the Burundi National Defence Force, deployed under bilateral and regional arrangements in combat against the Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi and Twirwaneho armed groups – both of which are also allegedly supported by Rwanda[12] – deepened regional security challenges.

11. By late 2024, despite international initiatives,[13] no tangible progress had been made towards a de-escalation of hostilities, which had already displaced an estimated 7.8 million

[3] A/HRC/54/73, para. 25.

[4] S/2022/479, para. 67; S/2024/432, paras. 40–45; and S/2025/446, paras. 34–56.

[5] S/2022/479, annex 39.

[6] See https://presidence.cd/uploads/files/Adresse%20a%CC%80%20la%20Nation%20suite%20a%CC%80%20la%20situation%20se%CC%81curitaire%20de%20l%27Est.pdf.

[7] Law No. 23/014 of 22 May 2023. The Réserve armée de défense is yet to be operationalized.

[8] Meetings between FARDC, representatives of Congolese armed groups and FDLR factions were held in North Kivu (May 2022), following which the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo reportedly transferred equipment, money and logistics to those groups (S/2025/446 paras. 63 and 70). In response to that report, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo noted that formal orders had been issued by the President and FARDC Chief of Staff to prohibit any collaboration with FDLR.

[9] "Wazalendo" is used for both Wazalendo and Volontaires pour la défense de la Patrie groups.

[10] S/2023/990.

[11] E.g., Nduma défense du Congo- Rénové was legitimized as Volontaires pour la défense de la Patrie, despite United Nations sanctions and an arrest warrant issued by Congolese authorities for its leader on accusations of war crimes. Nyatura Forces de défense des droits humains armed group rebranded as Volontaires pour la défense de la Patrie, despite being having committed most human rights abuses in North Kivu in 2021. See https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/bcnudh_-_communique_de_presse_-_note_annuelle_2021_.pdf.

[12] S/2025/446.

[13] The Nairobi process in April 2022 and the Luanda Process in July 2024.

people, nearly half of whom were children, and triggered one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the region.[14]

B. Territorial expansion of Mouvement du 23 mars (January–February 2025)

12. From late 2024, M23, with training, material, intelligence and operational support from the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF), captured strategic areas around Goma, the capital of North Kivu. On 23 January, M23 and RDF launched a coordinated offensive on Sake, 25 km west of Goma, eventually overwhelming FARDC troops supported by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Southern African Development Community Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and private military companies contracted by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.[15] On 27 January, M23 and RDF troops entered Goma via multiple fronts, sparking intense clashes and heavy artillery exchanges.[16] Many civilians were killed, while hundreds of civilians and disarmed FARDC members received protection in MONUSCO bases. Amid the clashes, over 4,500 detainees escaped from Munzenze central prison in Goma, including 1,497 who were being held for serious crimes, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law violations.

13. The spontaneous withdrawal of some FARDC troops from their positions, the killing of the military governor of North Kivu and the desertion of senior FARDC officers further accelerated the breakdown of Congolese defences. By 29 January, M23 and RDF had taken full control of the city.

14. In early February, with RDF support, M23 advanced into South Kivu. On 14 February, it seized Kavumu airport and two days later entered the provincial capital Bukavu without resistance, as government forces had withdrawn toward the Ruzizi Plain and Uvira.[17] Two additional prison breaks in Bukavu and Kabare on 14 February resulted in the escape of prisoners, including some convicted for crimes under international law.[18]

15. Upon capturing Goma and Bukavu, AFC/M23 appointed “administrators” to formalize its control as de facto authority.[19] AFC/M23 introduced its own tax collection system, generating revenue through the imposition of new taxes or the diversion of existing ones,[20] including on mining activities.[21] Civil servants and customary chiefs opposing M23 were replaced with supportive individuals.[22]

16. While the presence of RDF troops was instrumental in the rapid M23 takeover of Goma and Bukavu,[23] the extent of their continued presence in North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces after February remains difficult to verify. However, multiple sources reported that new appointees included Rwandan nationals. Similarly, many residents reported that Rwandan police officers regularly crossed the border to manage traffic in Goma.

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[14] See https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/announcements/drc-un-officials-raise-alarm-dramatic-impact-prolonged-conflict-women-and?.

[15] S/2025/446, para. 74.

[16] See annexes I and II.

[17] See annex III.

[18] According to UNJHRO, 2,285 and 221 inmates escaped from the central prison in Bukavu and Kabare prison, respectively.

[19] M23 appointed new governors and other local authorities in North Kivu and South Kivu.

[20] S/2025/446, annex 18.

[21] See https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cyvj986l615o and S/2024/689 para 20.

[22] S/2025/446, annex 17.

[23] The fact-finding mission’s findings reaffirmed Group of Experts’ findings (S/2025/446, paras. 35–36) on active and decisive involvement of RDF alongside M23 during the capture of Goma. Rwanda denied that claim in its response.

C. Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Wazalendo clashes (February–May 2025)

17. In South Kivu, emerging tensions between retreating FARDC and local Wazalendo groups escalated mid-February into violent clashes in Kamanyola and Uvira on the Burundian border, resulting in civilian casualties. The clashes facilitated the escape of a reported 770 inmates from Uvira prison on 19 February, including some sentenced for war crimes and crimes against humanity.[24] Thereafter, most FARDC troops withdrew further, effectively ceding control of Uvira and parts of Fizi territory to Wazalendo. Over the following months, Wazalendo members progressively consolidated their presence in those localities, imposing movement restrictions and illegal taxation measures on the population.[25]

D. Peace initiatives and re-escalation of violence (June–July 2025)

18. On 27 June, senior ministers of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda signed a peace agreement in Washington, D.C., which reaffirmed the commitment of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to neutralize FDLR and of Rwanda to disengage its forces and lift defensive measures, while acknowledging the shared responsibility of both Governments to cease support to non-State armed groups.[26] It was followed, on 19 July, by a Declaration of Principles of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and M23 in Doha committing to reaching a comprehensive peace agreement by 18 August.

19. Those initiatives regrettably did not translate into an immediate cessation of hostilities between M23 and FARDC, Wazalendo and allied armed groups.[27] In July, both M23 and FARDC reinforced their positions in South Kivu, near the Burundian border, making the security situation highly volatile and raising concerns about renewed violence and further regionalization of the conflict. M23 also maintained military pressure in North Kivu, targeting residual FARDC, FDLR and Wazalendo forces in Lubero, Rutshuru and Walikale territories. Notably, in July, M23 launched a major offensive operation in Bwisha chiefdom, Rutshuru, a predominantly Hutu area and traditional FDLR stronghold. Survivors described the summary execution of hundreds of – mostly Hutu – civilians, including dozens of children, including infants, with machetes and axes.[28]

IV. Legal framework

20. The situation in North Kivu and South Kivu is characterized by several non-international armed conflicts between FARDC and multiple armed groups, between RDF and armed groups and between different armed groups. The conflicts come under common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, customary rules of international humanitarian law and, where relevant, the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), to which the Democratic Republic of the Congo is party. In parallel, the international armed conflict opposing the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda triggered the application of the Geneva Conventions and the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), to which both States are Parties, and customary rules of international humanitarian law. The extensive support of Rwanda to M23, which may amount to overall control of that armed group, raises the possibility that hostilities between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and M23 are part of that international armed conflict.

[24] Information provided by the Government.

[25] See paras. 63–65 below.

[26] Peace Agreement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, 27 June 2025, para. 1. See https://www.state.gov/peace-agreement-between-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-the-republic-of-rwanda.

[27] Clashes continued between M23 and the FARDC, FDLR and Wazalendo coalition in Masisi.

[28] See para. 31 below.

21. International human rights law continues to apply in situations of armed conflict. As a Party to a number of international human rights treaties,[29] the Democratic Republic of the Congo must respect the human rights established therein and ensure their realization for all individuals in its territory, including by taking the steps available to protect all persons in its territory from serious threats to the enjoyment of their human rights posed by armed groups and other non-State actors. Where armed groups and other non-State actors exercise government-like functions and control over territory, they must themselves respect human rights norms when their conduct affects the rights of individuals under their control.

22. In addition to the obligations of Rwanda under international humanitarian law as a party to armed conflict,[30] the presence of RDF elements on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and their support of M23 raise the question of whether Rwanda assumed additional obligations as an occupying Power under international humanitarian law. Occupation existed if Rwanda exercised the requisite degree of control over parts of North Kivu and South Kivu during the period under review, through either the effective control of territory by RDF or overall control over M23 as a proxy force.[31] In addition, Rwanda has extraterritorial obligations under international human rights law to persons outside its territory but within its power or effective control, including the protection of the local population and the fulfilment of the full range of their human rights.

V. Conduct of hostilities

23. During the fighting for Goma, heavy weaponry was employed by all parties in densely populated areas, causing numerous civilian casualties and extensive damage to civilian infrastructure. Civilians were injured or killed by explosions and stray bullets and children suffered severe wounds, including disabling injuries. Three United Nations peacekeepers were also killed, allegedly in a targeted attack by M23 and RDF.[32]

24. Cross-border shelling between FARDC and RDF also allegedly resulted in civilian casualties, with Rwandan authorities reporting at least 16 deaths and 177 injured in Gisenyi, including women and children.[33] The mission was unable to corroborate the number of civilian casualties or assess the legality of the attacks under international humanitarian law. Information collected suggests, however, that FARDC failed to adequately distinguish military objectives during those exchanges.

25. The mission documented several attacks on displacement sites around Goma. For example, on 24 January, multiple projectiles, including a 122 mm rocket, struck Rusayo internally displaced persons camp, killing at least 14, mostly women and children, and injuring many others. Sources indicate that FARDC soldiers had placed weapons nearby and armed men were frequently observed inside the camps, blurring the distinction between military objectives and civilians and civilian objects, violating the humanitarian character of internally displaced persons sites, exposing such persons to significant risk and raising concerns regarding the obligation to take precautions to protect the population from the effects of attacks. Such conduct, however, did not relieve other parties of their own obligations under international humanitarian law.

26. Witnesses consistently reported that M23 members and RDF soldiers fired indiscriminately at FARDC soldiers, Wazalendo members and civilians attempting to flee the violence. Several accounts described them opening fire on individuals riding motorcycles at intersections or approaching checkpoints, without any apparent attempt to stop the individuals. Other witnesses recounted the summary execution of FARDC soldiers who were

[29] See https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=48&Lang=EN.

[30] In its response, Rwanda refuted being part of the conflict.

[31] See Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo conclusion that Rwanda has exercised overall control over M23 at least since January 2024 (S/2024/432, para. 45; and S/2025/446, para. 44).

[32] See https://unpeacemission.org/en/statement-attributable-to-spokesperson-secretary-general-democratic-republic-of-congo-2.html.

[33] Information provided by the Government of Rwanda.

wounded or captured or who had demonstrated clear intent to surrender. Such acts, if verified, may amount to war crimes.

27. The mission also received reports indicating potentially indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks in South Kivu. On 27 February, at least 13 individuals were killed when explosions occurred during an M23-organized gathering at Place de l'Indépendance in Bukavu. The mission was unable to identify the perpetrator. In June, clashes between M23 and Wazalendo, including shelling by all parties in Kabare territory, resulted in dozens of civilians killed.

28. Since January, at least 50 schools have been attacked. Over 60 have been used by parties to the conflict for military purposes, which exposes the schools to targeting and children to the risk of explosive remnants of war. Medical facilities were also affected. Reportedly, shells struck the maternity ward of Charité Maternelle Hospital in Goma on 28 January, killing and injuring several civilians, including newborns and pregnant women. On 9 March, a shell reportedly hit the paediatric ward of Walungu Hospital, killing five people, including two children. Under international humanitarian law, hospitals benefit from special protection and must not be attacked or looted or have their functioning disrupted.

VI. Patterns of violations in M23-controlled areas

29. After capturing territories, M23 engaged in a campaign of intimidation and violent repression through a pattern of summary executions, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, detention and enforced disappearance against the civilian population, with a stated objective of restoring order, security and stability.[34] While some victims were targeted on the basis of suspected affiliation to the Government, FARDC, Wazalendo or FDLR, similar violations and abuses were also widely committed against any civilian seen as representing a threat to order, security and stability, including perceived criminals, government supporters or critics of M23. Those acts appear to form part of a broader attempt by M23 to consolidate control through force, fear and coercion. At times, civilians were also killed for no discernable reason. Several interviewees stated, "people die like flies", denouncing the normalization of killings under M23 rule.

A. Summary executions

30. M23 members committed retaliatory killings immediately after seizing localities, targeting civilians, primarily men, suspected of collaborating with government forces. For example, several civilians were summarily executed in Minova, South Kivu, in January immediately after M23 took control. In June and July, M23 summarily executed dozens of individuals following confrontations with government forces in Walungu and Kabare territories, as apparent collective punishment.

31. From 8 to 29 July, M23 members, accompanied by civilians armed with machetes and alleged RDF soldiers, attacked several farms in Bwisha chiefdom and allegedly executed hundreds of civilians, mainly Hutus.[35] Survivors described assailants killing men, women, children, including infants, and the elderly with machetes and axes. Given time constraints, the mission could not fully investigate those incidents.

32. Since January, M23 has summarily executed dozens of civilians in the context of cordon and search operations in Goma and other localities.[36] For example, at least 21 civilians, including adolescent boys under 18, were executed during such operations in the Kasika neighbourhood of Goma on 22 and 23 February.[37] Armed M23 members went

[34] See https://online.fliphtml5.com/hqewn/amlh/#p=21.

[35] OHCHR reported that M23 killed at least 319 civilians in Rutshuru between 9 and 21 July. See https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/drc-turk-appalled-attacks-against-civilians-rwandan-backed-m23-and-other.

[36] See paras. 38–41 below.

[37] The number of victims is likely higher –up to 50 people killed during operations, according to some sources (see, e.g., S/2025/446, annex 49).

from door to door rounding up local youth, allegedly for criminality, and killed most victims at point-blank range. Others were shot while attempting to flee.

33. M23 also executed civilians accused of crimes, including minor offences. For example, on 16 February, in Bukavu, M23 members killed a man, allegedly for failing to present identification documents. On 22 February, a man was executed for stealing a telephone. The same day, two men accused of filming an M23 convoy were publicly executed, with the perpetrators reportedly telling bystanders, “no indiscipline will be tolerated”.

34. The mission recorded reports of at least 11 children deliberately shot at and killed by M23 for no discernable reason. For example, in February, in Goma, M23 elements shot a 17-year-old boy in the head at a bar. M23 also encircled a woman fleeing while carrying her two young children in April. They shot and killed her and her two children while she pleaded for mercy.

35. Credible allegations also indicate that M23 members incited acts of mob justice by transferring suspected criminals to members of local communities. In several cases, the individuals handed over were reportedly beaten to death or burned alive.

B. Suppression of civic space and intimidation of civil society

36. Civil society actors, especially human rights defenders, women activists, lawyers, journalists and media workers, were systematically targeted and intimidated by M23, including with threats from its senior officials. The mission documented summary executions, enforced disappearances, incommunicado detention, torture and death threats, and detention and harassment of civil society actors and their relatives. On 13 February, in Goma, M23 members killed Delcat Idengo, a singer and activist known for songs critical of both M23 and the Congolese authorities. M23 also prohibited local media outlets from broadcasting information from the Government or airing public debates, further isolating affected communities by limiting their ability to fully inform themselves of alternative viewpoints, in violation of the right to seek, receive and impart information.

37. The fear of reprisals prompted many members of civil society, especially human rights defenders and journalists, to flee, operate in secret or cease reporting or other protected activities altogether. That led to pervasive self-censorship, curtailing the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly for civil society activists, victims and the civilian population at large. The implementation of a “10 houses system”, an administrative structure for local chiefs appointed by M23 to monitor residents’ movements and report daily on suspicious activities, further enabled abusive security measures against ordinary civilians, including based on personally motivated denunciations, deepening a generalized climate of fear and mistrust among the population.

C. Detention and enforced disappearance

38. M23 detained thousands of civilians, primarily during cordon and search operations conducted almost daily since January. Initially presented as “security measures” to locate remaining FARDC soldiers and allies, those operations evolved into a systematic campaign of detention that also targeted people with family or other real or perceived ties to FARDC, members of civil society and people accused of offences or generally associated with criminality. In at least four incidents in Goma, M23 entered hospitals to locate suspected FARDC, Wazalendo and FDLR members being treated or hiding there, detaining hundreds of people, including patients, medical personnel and accompanying family members.

39. Many of those detained, mostly physically fit men and boys around 15 and older, were loaded into trucks and taken away. Relatives of detainees recounted searching for their loved ones, going from one place of detention to another, but being chased away, threatened or beaten. Many families had to pay ransoms or bribes for the release of or to obtain information on their family members.

40. The mission confirmed that many of those detained were initially taken to "training" camps for the purpose of forced recruitment.[38] However, the fate and whereabouts of hundreds of other men, women and children forcibly taken remain unknown.

41. The mission also recorded accounts of boys and girls abducted in the street and held in detention sites or taken to unknown destinations. In early 2025, the number of children separated from their parents and living on the streets of Goma rose significantly because of the escalating violence. On 17 February, AFC/M23 issued a one-week ultimatum for parents to retrieve their children.[39] Similar threats continued until July, warning of punishment for street youth involved in crime. Some children have been arrested, despite committing no offence, and held together with adults.

D. Deaths in custody, torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment

42. The mission confirmed widespread torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including sexual violence, inflicted on individuals held at M23-run detention sites. Former detainees described being held incommunicado in severely overcrowded, unsanitary and poorly ventilated improvised locations and receiving insufficient food. One source reported not receiving food for a week, while another observed that weaker detainees were unable to reach the shared food quickly enough. Access to water and sanitary facilities was restricted, with detainees being forced to urinate through a hole in the shipping container in which they were held and to defecate in bags. Teenage children were held together with adults in equally inhumane and degrading conditions.

43. Some detainees were beaten every morning with whips or tree branches, in some cases with their arms tied behind their backs, until, according to victim accounts, they could no longer move. Other detainees were beaten to death or executed, or died from the effects of injuries, suffocation, illnesses and/or the lack of food and water. In some cases, detainees were stripped naked, doused with cold water and subjected to physical and psychological torture, such as being held at gunpoint until they confessed to crimes they had not committed. Torture and other forms of ill-treatment were inflicted with the apparent intent to intimidate and punish.

44. The mission identified several improvised detention sites in North Kivu and South Kivu, including shipping containers, underground cells and government buildings.[40] Some of those sites served as transit places before detainees were sent to M23 "training" camps. Accounts indicated that some guards were Rwandans. The mission also received credible information that senior M23 commanders, including an M23 military leader, were present at some of those detention sites. Their names are on file.

E. Forced recruitment, including recruitment of children

45. Thousands of civilians, including adolescent girls and boys, were forcibly recruited after being detained during search operations. Many were coerced into joining M23, fearing for their lives or retaliation against their families, with witnesses reporting that some recruits had to enlist after seeing others being brutally beaten, sometimes to death. Others were recruited with false promises of employment. Adolescent boys, reported to be around 15 and older, and young men were particularly targeted to bolster M23 ranks, with no age verification conducted.

46. Individuals forcibly recruited or otherwise detained were transported to former FARDC camps in Rumangabo and Tshanzu, Rutshuru territory,[41] to undergo "re-education" and military "training" for three or four months, before reportedly being deployed to the front line. Survivors and witnesses reported thousands of men and some women and children

[38] See paras. 45–48 below.

[39] Information from written and verbal instructions issued by de facto authorities and obtained by the mission.

[40] See annex IV.

[41] The mission received information on other possible camps.

forced to carry out intensive labour, including digging and clearing roads, cutting and transporting wood and carrying water over long distances.

47. Survivors described receiving only minimal food and water, being denied medical assistance and having limited access to hygiene facilities. Detainees were severely beaten, including to death, and others died from exhaustion, dehydration or hunger. Guards from Tshanzu removed women from their compounds at night and many women detainees, unable to endure the hunger, were subjected to sexual exploitation, forced to exchange sex for food. Detainees who attempted to escape were executed in front of the other detainees and their bodies displayed as a warning. One survivor reported, "Tshanzu was hell".

48. Survivors' accounts, corroborated by M23-released video footage, identified high-ranking M23 officers present in the camps. Recruits stated that most of their instructors and guards were Rwandan nationals, including uniformed RDF members.

F. Widespread conflict-related sexual violence

49. The mission verified cases of sexual violence by M23. Some victims recounted being raped or gang-raped in their homes alongside their mothers, daughters or sisters. One victim reported M23 conducting house-to-house searches looking for FARDC soldiers in Katindo neighbourhood, Goma. She was gang-raped by three M23 members, together with her mother. Others, including girls, were abducted and held, sometimes for weeks, in residences and hotels occupied by M23 members, where they were subjected to repeated rapes and other abuses.

50. Cases of sexual violence were also documented in detention. Women, men and boys, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, were subjected to gang rapes while detained in improvised M23 detention facilities or private residences. Other incidents included so-called "corrective rapes", forced nudity, non-consensual touching, sexual slurs and other sexualized acts intended to humiliate victims, perpetrated either by M23 guards or by co-detainees at the instigation or with the acquiescence of the de facto authorities. Testimonies indicate that such rapes were repeated over prolonged periods, often in conjunction with additional acts of physical and psychological torture and other ill-treatment, with a manifest intent to degrade, punish and break the dignity of victims.

G. Forced displacement

51. After capturing Goma, M23 members ordered tens of thousands of internally displaced persons living in camps around the city to dismantle their shelters and return to their villages.[42] Internally displaced persons reported being given a few hours or a few days to leave, even though they had nowhere safe to go and no means of transport. Some were beaten or threatened with death by M23. Photographs, videos and satellite imagery showed camps around Goma completely emptied in a matter of days.[43] Many internally displaced persons ended up living in the streets, in schools, in churches or with families, with limited or no access to humanitarian aid.

52. The mission also documented that some displaced families who had returned to their places of origin were once again expelled by M23. For example, on 25 February, Hutu families who had returned to Karenga, Masisi territory, North Kivu, following the forced dismantlement of their camp were ordered to leave the town within a day and were told that, if they did not comply, "the Red Cross would come to collect [their] bodies".

53. The mission also documented serious allegations of deportations of civilians from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Rwanda. Between 10 and 13 May, M23 forces detained hundreds of people, mostly men and adolescent boys, during cordon and search operations

[42] At the end of February, over 500,000 persons had been displaced from sites in Goma and the outskirts of Nyiragongo territory. See https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1461/files/reports/DRC_Goma_Eval_ENG%20Final_1.pdf.

[43] See annex V.

in Goma, Nyiragongo and Sake and took them to Goma stadium, where they were grouped by presumed affiliation: FARDC, Wazalendo and FDLR members, alleged criminals and groups of men, women and children presented as "Rwandans" despite having Congolese identification documents. AFC/M23 officials paraded them before the media.

54. Witnesses reported that, while presumed former armed elements were taken to unknown destinations, those presented as "Rwandans" were forcibly taken by bus to a transit centre in Goma run by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), after the same M23 officials had publicly burned their Congolese national voter cards. Some were held there for up to three weeks, while the transit centre was reportedly surrounded by armed M23. Most were eventually deported to Rwanda. On 22 May, UNHCR stated that more than 1,700 "Rwandan nationals" brought to a transit centre after cordon and search operations had been returned to Rwanda after screening interviews conducted "under pressure".[44] Many of those transferred to Rwanda were the families expelled from Karenga on 25 February.[45] Forcibly displacing or deporting civilians, unless their security or imperative military reasons so demand, amounts to a war crime.[46]

VII. Patterns of violations by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Wazalendo and affiliated groups

A. Conflict-related sexual violence

55. The mission identified a pattern of widespread use of sexual violence and looting by members of FARDC and Wazalendo during their retreat from the front lines in January and February. Civil society organizations reported over 1,000 victims of sexual violence between January and June in South Kivu, mostly women and teenage girls,[47] while official sources reported 127 cases of sexual violence in South Kivu in the first two weeks of February alone.[48]

56. Witnesses and victims described armed men forcibly entering homes, stealing valuables, raping women, girls and, in some cases, men, and executing those who resisted. One man in South Kivu was stripped naked, severely beaten until he lost consciousness and gang-raped by FARDC and Wazalendo members going from house to house to loot. In North Kivu, women and adolescent girls were subjected to gang rapes by retreating FARDC and Wazalendo members. One woman was held hostage, tied to a tree and raped daily for two weeks by multiple perpetrators until her family paid a ransom.

57. Sources specifically identified members of the Guépard and Satan II FARDC units, deployed along the South Kivu front line, as responsible for multiple incidents of sexual violence and looting. Perpetrators operated in large groups and in multiple localities simultaneously, in a manner that demonstrated recurring patterns of rape and looting, rather than isolated acts.

58. While Wazalendo members often seem to have regarded pillage as a form of compensation for their role in the conflict, the widespread looting by FARDC was allegedly driven by irregular salary payments, weak command and control structures and widespread impunity. Witnesses interviewed by the mission often described FARDC soldiers as "bandits" and denounced the "brutality" of those retreating from Bukavu.

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[44] See https://www.unhcr.org/africa/news/press-releases/unhcr-statement-recent-return-rwandan-refugees-eastern-democratic-republic and https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250529-rwanda-les-rapatriements-de-ressortissants-rwandais-r%C3%A9fugi%C3%A9s-en-rdc-v%C3%A9cus-comme-un-retour-forc%C3%A9.

[45] See para. 52 above.

[46] Protocol II, art. 17 (2); International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, Volume I: *Rules*, rule 129 (B); and Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 8 (2) (e) (viii).

[47] Information provided by civil society.

[48] Information provided by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

B. Summary executions

59. The mission documented deliberate killings of civilians by FARDC after in-fighting with Wazalendo, often in retaliation for presumed support to Wazalendo. From 15 to 17 February, soldiers from the Guépard and Satan II FARDC units summarily executed at least 20 civilians in Kamanyola after hundreds of their troops died during clashes with Wazalendo. Most victims, men and adolescent boys suspected of belonging to or supporting Wazalendo, were shot in the streets or during door-to-door searches. Credible sources believe the death toll to be significantly higher, though that requires further investigation.

C. Recruitment and use of children

60. The mission received credible evidence of the recruitment and use of children under 18 by Wazalendo groups. Community mobilization campaigns, with door-to-door visits and mass events, were held, particularly between February and April in Fizi territory, during which boys and girls were encouraged to enrol to "save their homeland from foreign forces". Children recruited were used as fighters, messengers and escorts, for domestic tasks and in surveillance or espionage-related roles.

61. According to verified witness accounts, boys evidently under 18 years of age were seen carrying weapons at Wazalendo checkpoints in South Kivu, patrolling in Uvira and bearing AK-47 rifles in Fizi territory. Girls were subjected to sexual violence, used for sexual purposes by commanders and other armed groups members, and in such support functions as cook or messenger. Certain Wazalendo groups have used children under 15 in hostilities, which is a war crime.[49]

62. During the clashes leading to the takeover of Goma and Bukavu, children, primarily boys, took uniforms and weapons left behind by fleeing Wazalendo and FARDC members and joined residents in efforts to defend the cities. Children were observed firing weapons, engaging in confrontations and looting or defending houses and shops. Children who found and took weapons were at high risk of being killed, as a result of either their active participation in hostilities or their perceived involvement. The mission examined allegations of at least six such children killed when M23 entered Bukavu, but could not determine the precise circumstances of their deaths.

D. Discrimination, hate speech and restrictions on freedom of movement

63. After February, Wazalendo groups capitalized on the security vacuum left by the retreat of Congolese security forces to assert control over Uvira and parts of Fizi territory. They established parallel administrative and judicial structures, conducted informal trials and carried out illegal arrests. The mission identified at least 13 detention sites under the direct authority of self-proclaimed Wazalendo "generals", where detainees were routinely subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment.

64. Wazalendo groups substantially restricted freedom of movement with numerous checkpoints in Uvira and along the Uvira-Kamanyola or Uvira-Fizi roads, where civilians were required to pay "fees". The mission received reports indicating systematic discrimination against internally displaced persons from the Bashi community, who were forced to pay more than other ethnic communities at checkpoints. Wazalendo groups targeted Bashi internally displaced persons for extortion in exchange for "protection". Local groups reportedly stigmatized and accused the Bashi community of surrendering Bukavu to M23.

65. Hostility towards members of the Rwandophone and Tutsi communities continued to be fuelled by hate speech and incitement to violence. Tutsi and Banyamulenge populations were repeatedly labelled as "foreigners" or "proxies of Rwanda" and were accused of causing the conflict. The mission received multiple reports of members of the Tutsi community being killed, and others being denied access to local markets on ethnic grounds.

[49] Rome Statute, art. 8 (2) (e) (vii).

VIII. Patterns of sexual and gender-based violence

66. The escalation of violence in January led to a sharp rise in sexual violence reported by the United Nations and humanitarian organizations,[50] with cases involving children tripling in one month.[51] Most cases remain unreported due to stigma, fear of reprisals and lack of access to services. Sexual violence took place mainly in the form of gang rapes by up to seven perpetrators, during or after military operations, in the context of disruption of law and order or during the displacement of populations fleeing armed conflict. The mission verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by most parties to the conflict, primarily against women and girls, including girls as young as 10.

67. In some instances, victims were abducted and subjected to sexual slavery. For example, a 19-year-old woman was abducted and taken to an unknown location to become the "wife" of an FDLR element, who raped her repeatedly over two days. Women and girls became pregnant or died from the consequences of rape. Some were killed for resisting. Rapes were often carried out in the presence of family members, at gunpoint and accompanied by death threats, severe physical violence, abduction and the killing of family members. In some cases, women were raped in apparent reprisal when perpetrators could not locate their husbands.

68. Cases of sexual violence against men and boys and LGBT individuals were also recorded, although such cases remain largely unreported. For example, the mission verified the case of a 13-year-old boy who was raped along with his mother, and a 14-year-old boy who was beaten and forced to have sexual intercourse with a female relative in front of his siblings. A case of forced nudity, beatings and public humiliation of, and homo-transphobic insults against, an individual by Wazalendo members was also documented.

69. The mission confirmed that, during the mass escape from Munzenze prison on 27 January, most of the 160 women inmates, along with numerous infants, died, after an undetermined number had been gang-raped, in some cases in front of their children, by male inmates who had forced their way into the women's unit. Some sources reported that prisoners set fire to the cells to escape, while others described detonations from shelling.[52] A victim reported that her child sustained injuries caused by shell fragments and another recounted being "thrown against the wall" after hearing "bomb detonations". Official sources reported that 144 women and 30 infants died during the incident.[53]

70. According to the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNJHRO), 199 persons convicted of sexual and gender-based crimes escaped from Bukavu, Kabare and Goma prisons.[54] Their escape, and that of those convicted of other serious crimes, has placed victims and witnesses at heightened risk of reprisals. For example, the mission confirmed that a previously convicted escapee had repeatedly raped and ill-treated victims and human rights defenders who had testified against him in court, and made death threats against them.

71. Numerous women and girls reported enduring severe physical and psychological pain, and possible lifelong health issues as a result of rape, including infertility and HIV infection. A woman was reportedly in a coma for a month after being subjected to rape and other forms of torture. Many victims also exhibited acute stress reactions, including symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder. Victims' access to appropriate healthcare remained severely constrained due to ongoing hostilities, their limited financial resources, threats against healthcare personnel, non-payment of salaries to medical staff, insufficient post-

[50] E.g., https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-statement-sexual-violence-perpetrated-against-women-and-girls-eastern-democratic, https://www.msf.org/women-eastern-drc-nowhere-safe-sexual-violence and https://actionaid.org/news/2025/women-evicted-drc-camps-face-widespread-sexual-violence-and-forced-marriage-actionaid.

[51] See https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/reports-grave-violations-against-children-eastern-democratic-republic-congo-tripled.

[52] See annex VI.

[53] Information provided by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

[54] Information provided by UNJHRO.

exposure prophylaxis kits and a reduction in international funding to health and support providers.

72. Sexual violence also resulted in deep disruption of family and community ties, sometimes causing the displacement of victims from their homes and leaving them with no economic means of survival. Many women and girls did not disclose being raped to their family members, fearing stigmatization. Others described losing family moral and economic support and being forced to drop out of school because of shame and mockery. Men and LGBT individuals were also stigmatized by their communities.

IX. Findings on responsibilities

73. The mission finds that there are reasonable grounds to believe that, since January 2025, all parties to the conflict in North Kivu and South Kivu have committed gross human rights violations and abuses and serious violations of international humanitarian law, many of which may further amount to crimes under international law, and which warrant prompt criminal investigations by competent authorities, in accordance with international standards.

A. War crimes

74. More specifically, the mission found reasonable grounds to believe that M23 members, and in some cases RDF soldiers, had committed war crimes involving violence to life and person, in particular murder, wilful killing, cruel treatment and torture, outrages upon personal dignity, particularly humiliating and degrading treatment, unlawful confinement and hostage-taking. The mission also found that M23 members had committed the war crimes of rape and sexual slavery and ordering the displacement of the civilian population for reasons not justified by security or imperative military necessity.

75. It also found that FARDC soldiers and members of allied groups had committed the war crimes of violence to life and person, in particular murder, cruel treatment and torture, pillage, rape and sexual slavery, and that certain Wazalendo members and leaders had committed the war crime of conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 and using them in hostilities.

B. Crimes against humanity

76. The mission also has reasonable grounds to believe that M23 members may have committed, further to a widespread and systematic attack against a civilian population on the basis of organizational policy, the crimes against humanity of murder, severe deprivation of liberty, torture, rape and sexual slavery, enslavement in “training” camps serving to exact forced labour and military servitude, enforced disappearance and deportation or forcible transfer of population.

77. The mission collected reliable information that, since January, M23 had detained thousands of civilians, mostly men and boys, in large-scale and well-coordinated operations, imprisoned them in concealed places of detention and/or sent them for forced re-education, forced labour and military “training” in dedicated camps, often under threat of death or physical violence and in inhumane conditions. M23 members committed rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual slavery, primarily targeting women and girls, along with torture and other forms of ill-treatment and summary executions on a widespread scale in their efforts to locate real or perceived security or reputational threats. Those acts, directly involving senior M23 members, formed part of a widespread and systematic attack against a civilian population, affecting thousands of civilians perceived as opposing M23, regarded as a threat to its notion of order and security or deemed fit to fight or serve M23. They occurred daily across the entirety of the territory under M23 control and followed discernible, recurring patterns, indicating a high degree of organization, planning and resource mobilization. The mission finds that there are strong indications that those acts were carried out in furtherance of an organizational policy aimed at strengthening M23 forces,

consolidating control over newly captured areas and asserting M23 notions of "order and security" by eliminating any perceived threat to its authority.[55]

78. The mission also examined whether the repeated acts of rape, gang rape and other forms of sexual violence committed by specific FARDC units in January and February could amount to crimes against humanity. During their retreat, soldiers from the Guépard and Satan II units repeatedly entered homes, looted property and raped civilians, following a consistent pattern across multiple locations and over a wide geographical area. The scale, geographical spread, number of victims and recurring nature of those crimes are key factors indicating a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population. However, on the basis of the information currently before it, the mission is unable to conclude, to the relevant standard, that those acts occurred in course of an attack carried out pursuant to or in furtherance of a State policy.[56] Further investigation of that serious issue is warranted. Irrespective of the classification under international criminal law, there is an urgent need for accountability for such conduct. The mission underlines that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has long neglected profound structural problems within its armed forces, particularly irregular salary payments, weak command and control and widespread impunity, creating conditions that further facilitated and abetted commission of unlawful acts against civilians. Members of the Guépard and Satan II units, in particular, had been previously known to engage in such acts.[57]

C. Identification of perpetrators

79. The mission compiled initial dossiers identifying individuals, units and entities possibly responsible for violations and abuses for further assessment by competent accountability mechanisms, in accordance with international standards. While some witnesses could directly implicate specific individuals, including senior officials, others were unable to identify perpetrators' names, rank, position, unit or affiliation and could provide only limited indications, such as type of uniform or language spoken. The mission underscores the need for further investigations into the roles, actions and knowledge of individuals potentially involved in violations of international law, including international crimes, also through command or superior responsibility.

D. State responsibility

80. The Democratic Republic of the Congo bears responsibility for violations committed by its armed forces, including widespread sexual violence and pillage perpetrated during their retreat. When abandoning positions without ensuring an organized withdrawal of troops under their command, FARDC commanders enabled the commission of violations. Under basic principles of international law, the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains responsible for violations committed by its armed forces, even when those acts may exceed the scope of orders.[58]

81. Rwanda is likewise responsible for violations directly committed by its armed forces on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including its own personnel deployed to M23 "training" camps. The mission has received credible allegations concerning the covert presence of RDF personnel within M23. Numerous victims and witnesses identified perpetrators as "Rwandans", citing the language they spoke (Kinyarwanda or English), accents or other distinguishing features, such as uniforms, indicating that RDF personnel may have directly participated in other M23 violations.

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[55] Rome Statute, art. 7 (1).

[56] Ibid., art. 7 (2) (a).

[57] Information provided by MONUSCO.

[58] *Yearbook of the International Law Commission, 2001*, vol. II (Part Two), para. 76, art. 7; ICRC, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, rule 149; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 2 (1).

82. While further investigation is necessary to assess the degree of control Rwanda exercised over M23, the mission found evidence that Rwanda has provided, at a minimum, consistent and significant military, logistical and material support. The direct involvement of RDF played a pivotal role in M23 territorial expansion, specifically the takeover of Goma. That support, coupled with multiple reports of serious violations committed by M23, should have prompted Rwanda to exercise its influence to stop and prevent further violations. Rwanda appears, however, to have failed to use its leverage, as required by its obligations under common article 1 of the Geneva Conventions, to ensure respect for international humanitarian law.[59] Rwanda also appears to have violated its obligations under article 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict to take all feasible measures to prevent the recruitment and use of children under 18 by M23.

83. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is likewise responsible for violations committed by Wazalendo and FDLR to the extent that their members acted under its direction or control.[60] For many violations, the mission lacked sufficient information to demonstrate that the State had exercised the necessary level of direction or control. The assessment was complicated by the fragmented nature of Wazalendo groups and their varying degrees of autonomy from FARDC. However, the mission notes that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo initiated a programme, instituted without adequate safeguards or oversight, to legitimize, arm and collaborate with those non-State actors, many of whom were known for committing violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of international human rights law, prioritizing immediate defence concerns over protection of civilians and structural reforms. That strategy, in the view of the mission, reflects a breach of its obligations under common article 1 of the Geneva Conventions to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, and its obligation under international human rights law to take the steps available to protect its own population from serious harm.[61]

84. In accordance with article 4 of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is required to take all feasible steps to prevent the recruitment of children under 18 by armed groups. While noting positive steps taken in recent years, which led to FARDC being delisted in 2017 from the annex of the report on children and armed conflict of the Secretary-General for the recruitment of children,[62] the mission considers that the Democratic Republic of the Congo may also bear responsibility for the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18 by Wazalendo groups.[63]

X. Accountability challenges

85. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has the primary responsibility to prevent violations from being committed on its territory and to ensure accountability. While the International Criminal Court is undertaking, within its jurisdiction, vitally important investigations, which must be supported and sustained, those efforts address a limited number of the most serious cases and alleged perpetrators and cannot address the full range of criminality at issue. Congolese judicial authorities have taken important steps to hold perpetrators of international crimes accountable, leading to convictions against State agents and commanders of armed groups in high-profile cases in 2024.[64] The mission also recognizes the important efforts made to combat conflict-related sexual violence, including legislation and action plans for the armed forces and the police. Challenges ahead remain immense in scale and scope, as thousands of victims still await justice and reparations for crimes committed since the conflict started in late 2021. The Government's support to known perpetrators of violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights

[59] ICRC, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, rule 144.
[60] *Yearbook of the International Law Commission, 2001*, vol. II (Part Two), para. 76, arts. 5 and 8.
[61] Human Rights Committee, general comments Nos. 31 (2004) and 36 (2018).
[62] A/72/361-S/20174/821, para. 246.
[63] In February 2025, the Congolese Ministry of Defence instructed armed forces to refrain from recruiting children, although this was not enforced against Wazalendo groups.
[64] Information provided by UNJHRO.

law within Wazalendo and FDLR is a serious setback in the fight against impunity and must be reversed.

86. The escalation of hostilities since January has triggered a near-total collapse of the rule of law in North Kivu and South Kivu. With the withdrawal of most judicial and law enforcement personnel, or their replacement by de facto authorities, the formal justice system ceased to function. Many official premises, including courts, tribunals and administrative offices, were looted, destroyed or taken over by armed groups, resulting in the loss of most judicial files and archives. Worryingly, during a wave of jailbreaks in early 2025, thousands of individuals, including those convicted of international crimes, escaped. Many now pose grave risks to victims and the witnesses who testified against them, and to the civilian population at large.

87. The lifting of the moratorium on the death penalty in March 2024 by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo undermined further the rule of law and distracts from the important structural reforms needed to address the root causes of impunity, including the chronic underfunding and lack of independence of judicial institutions and the weak protection of victims and witnesses. The mission stresses the need for a comprehensive approach to accountability that includes the right to truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition, with effective participation of women's and victims' organizations in the implementation of such measures. Although the establishment of a national reparations fund for victims of sexual violence constitutes an important step, the mission is concerned about delays in its operationalization and the lack of payouts to victims.[65]

88. Those shortcomings are further compounded by the failure to reference the needs for accountability and support to the victims in the peace agreement signed between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in Washington, D.C., on 27 June. It is important that negotiations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and M23, following the Declaration of Principles signed in Doha on 19 July, directly and meaningfully address the need for justice and reparation for violations of all parties, without which a sustainable and durable peace is unlikely to be achieved.

89. Despite its stated commitments to respecting international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo,[66] M23 has not taken measures to prevent or sanction violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the territory under its control. As detailed in the present report, M23 attempts to impose control, security and order have instead resulted in widespread violations and abuses.

90. Rwanda also bears responsibility for ensuring accountability for violations committed by its own forces operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To the mission's knowledge, no measures to ensure accountability have been taken to date.

XI. Conclusion

91. **The findings of the mission underscore the gravity and widespread nature of violations and abuses committed by all parties to the conflict, including acts that may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. With reports of violations continuing, both the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Government of Rwanda must take urgent action to ensure strict respect for international law by their own national forces and affiliated armed groups, while ceasing to support the latter.**

92. **Both Governments must take concrete steps to address the pressing need for truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition, which have been largely ignored in recent peace initiatives. If left unaddressed, the violations, abuses and crimes**

[65] Act No. 22/065 (2022) on principles of protection of victims and reparation for victims of conflict-related sexual violence and other crimes against peace and security of humankind.

[66] See https://online.fliphtml5.com/hqewn/amlh/#p=30.

committed in the North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces will perpetuate recurring cycles of violence and further endanger national and regional stability.

93. **Given the scale of the additional allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law from the resurgence of M23 between 2021 and the end of 2024 that were not documented in the present report and considering the continuing and evolving nature of the situation, sustained, independent and well-resourced monitoring and investigations remain essential, including through the prompt establishment of the commission of inquiry mandated in resolution S-37/1.**

XII. Recommendations

94. **The fact-finding mission recommends that all parties to conflict:**

(a) **Ensure full respect for international humanitarian law, take all precautions feasible to avoid and/or minimize civilian harm and cease the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas;**

(b) **Immediately end sexual violence and take all measures necessary to prevent and protect all individuals from such acts;**

(c) **Immediately halt the recruitment of boys and girls, release all persons under 18 recruited and withdraw from schools occupied or used for military purposes;**

(d) **Release civilians arbitrarily or unlawfully detained and disclose their fate and whereabouts, ensure humane treatment of detainees, access to legal counsel and communication with families, and grant independent monitors access to all places of detention, including so-called "training" camps and military and intelligence facilities.**

95. **The mission recommends that the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo:**

(a) **Ensure timely, independent and impartial investigations into alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law and hold all perpetrators accountable;**

(b) **Cease all forms of material support to FDLR, Wazalendo and other armed groups engaged in the current conflict alongside FARDC forces;**

(c) **Fully integrate accountability and transitional justice in peace negotiations and agreements with all relevant parties;**

(d) **Advance transitional justice processes in parallel to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to ensure a holistic response to violations, ensuring victims' rights to truth, justice and reparations;**

(e) **Implement the existing legal framework to prevent and punish sexual violence and provide thorough reparations to victims, including by eliminating administrative obstacles and putting in place monitoring and evaluation mechanisms;**

(f) **Provide support to children separated from armed groups and foster their long-term reintegration into society;**

(g) **Accelerate comprehensive security-sector reforms addressing persistent structural weaknesses within the armed forces and security institutions, including alleged corruption, underfunding and lack of accountability;**

(h) **Establish a rigorous vetting mechanism with independent and transparent process to prevent the recruitment or integration into national security forces, including the Réserve armée de défense, of individuals implicated in serious crimes, and ensure accountability.**

96. **The mission recommends that the authorities of Rwanda:**

(a) **Cease all forms of support to M23 facilitating or otherwise materially contributing to its operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo;**

(b) **Conduct prompt, transparent, independent and impartial investigations into all alleged human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law committed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by RDF, M23 and other armed groups supported by Rwanda, and ensure those responsible are held accountable;**

(c) **Facilitate the safe, voluntary and dignified repatriation of civilians forcibly transferred or deported from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Rwanda in the course of the armed conflicts.**

97. **The mission recommends that the international community:**

(a) **Support mediation initiatives and peace processes for sustainable solutions, including by addressing its root causes;**

(b) **Maintain pressure on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to cease support to non-State armed groups and engage in negotiations, in good faith;**

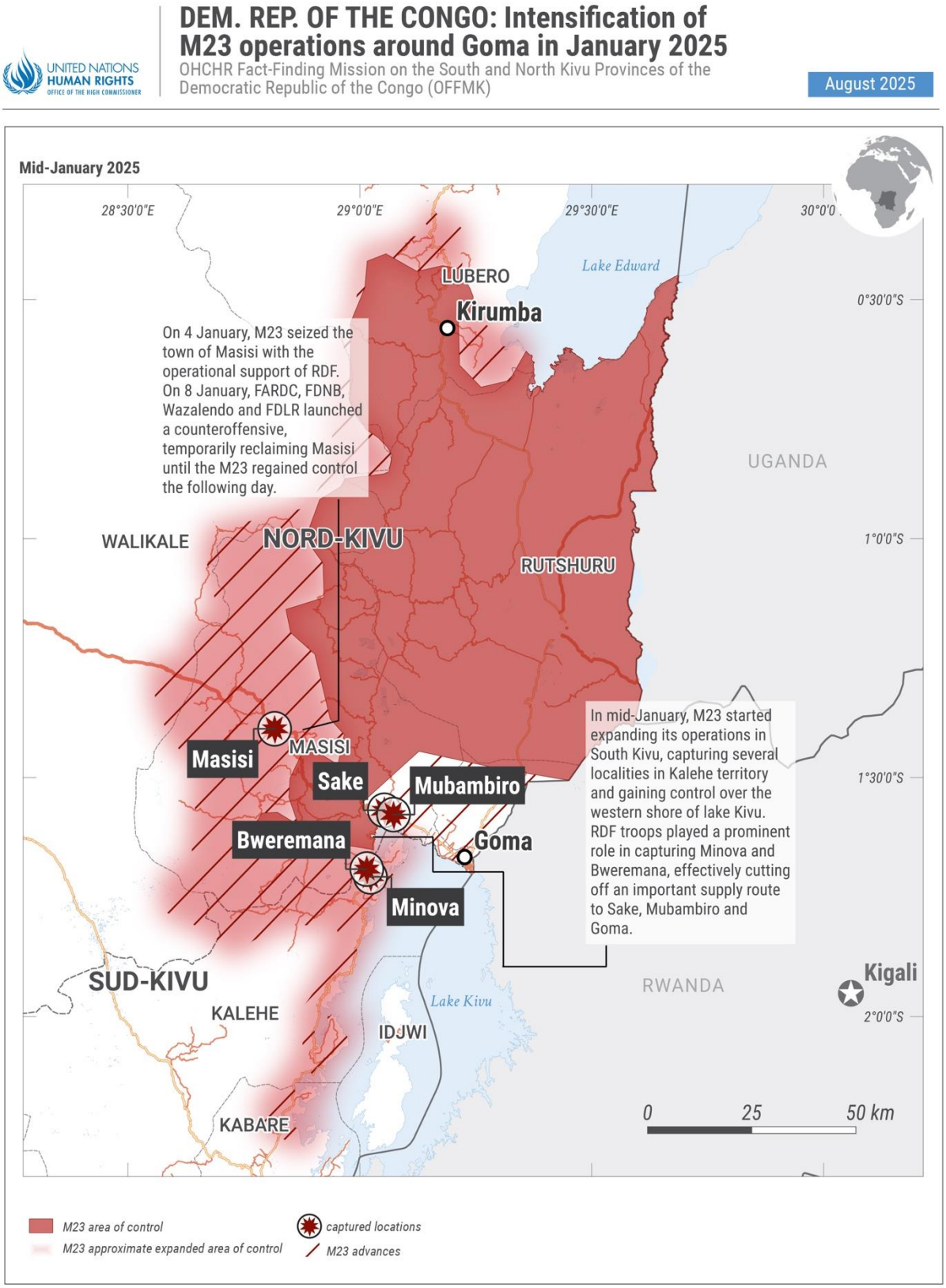
(c) **Integrate comprehensive victim-centred measures for truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition into peace negotiations and ensure the meaningful participation of women and youth;**

(d) **Ensure that full financial resources are made available through the United Nations regular budget for the independent commission of inquiry mandated in resolution S-37/1 to be able to fulfil its mandate;**

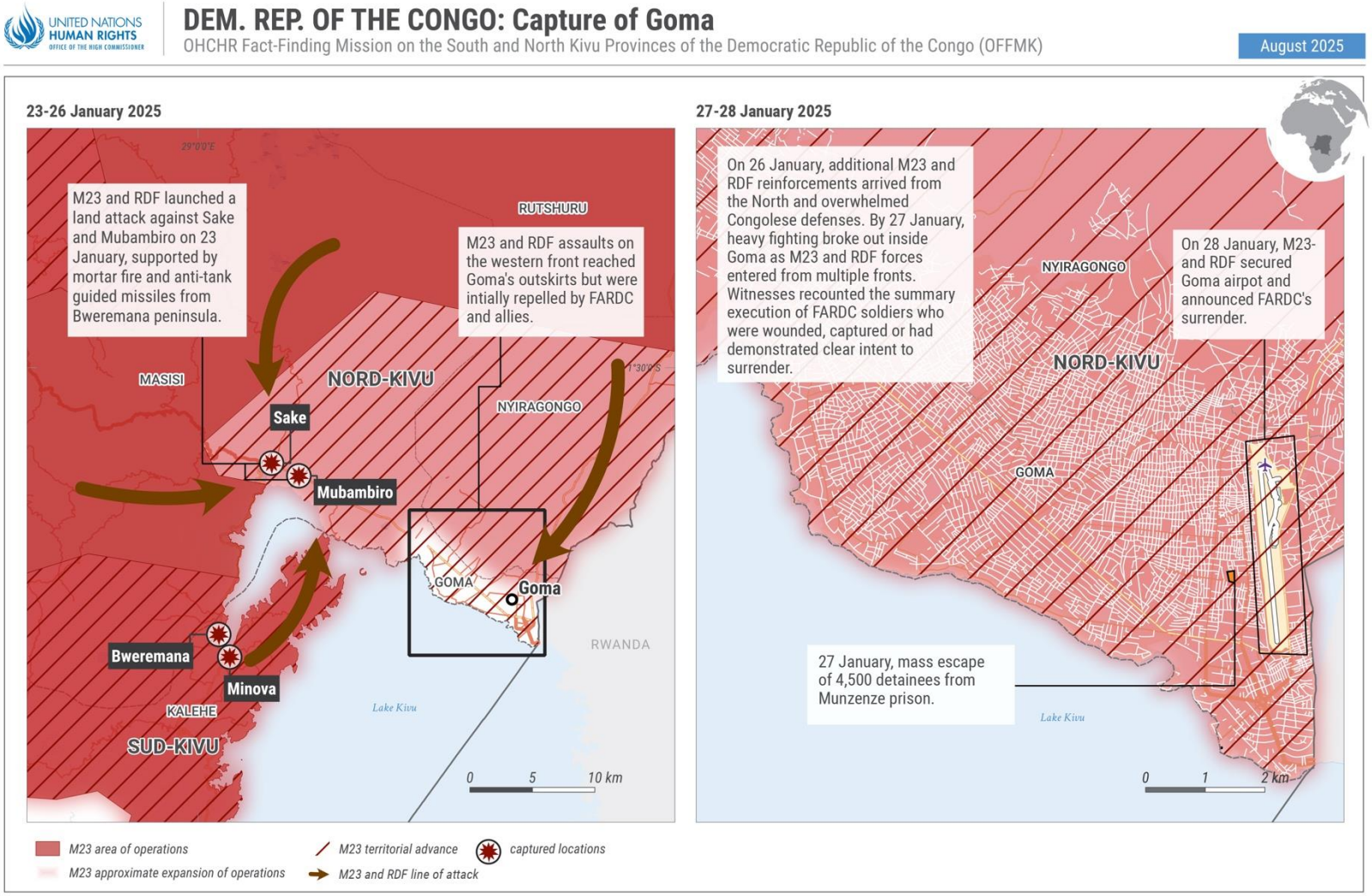
(e) **Support the International Criminal Court's investigations related to the conflicts in North Kivu and South Kivu;**

(f) **Support humanitarian organizations to ensure holistic and non-discriminatory delivery of assistance, especially to children and victims of sexual violence.**

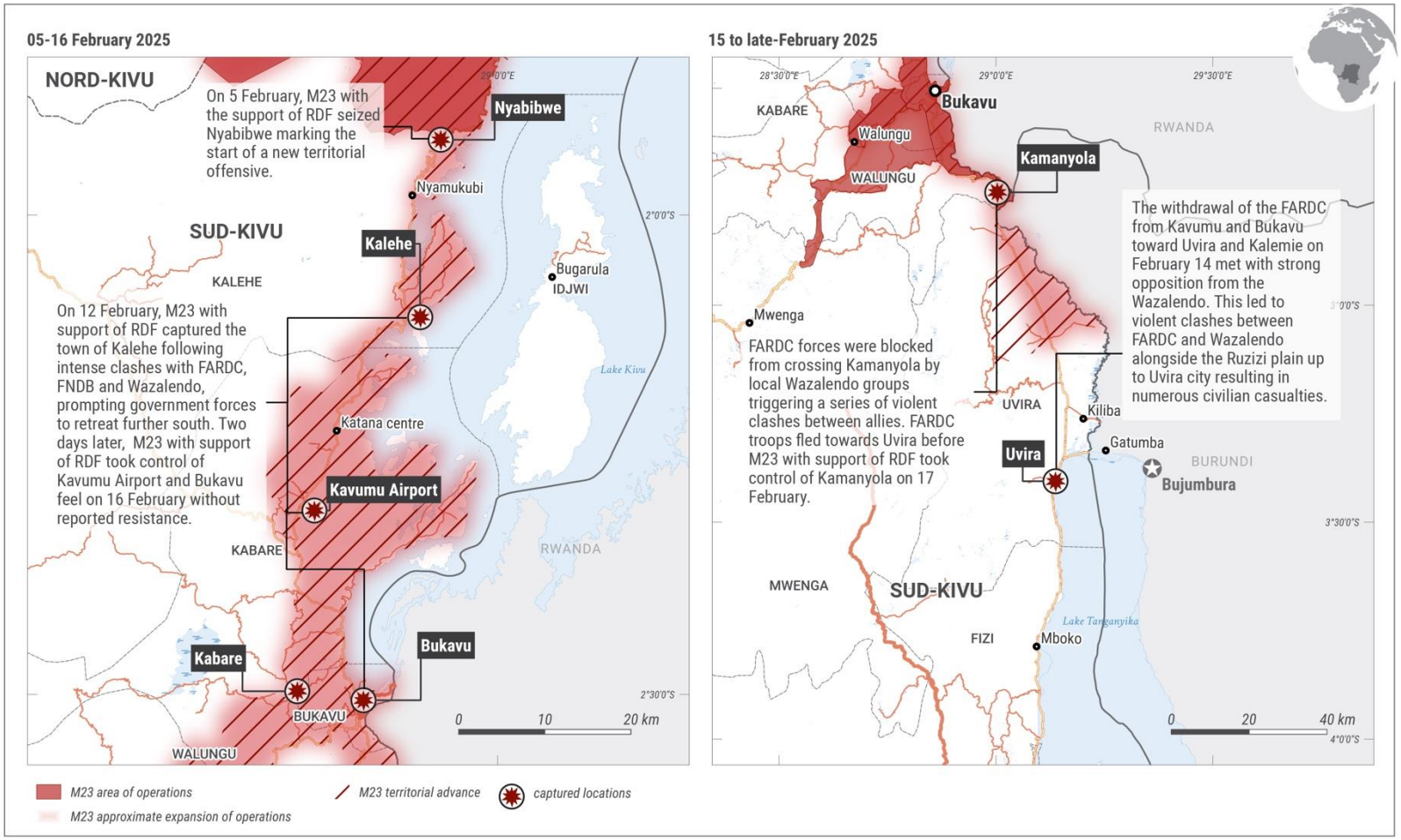
Annex I


UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
DEM. REP. OF THE CONGO: Intensification of M23 operations around Goma in January 2025
OHCHR Fact-Finding Mission on the South and North Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (OFFMK)
August 2025
Mid-January 2025
28°30'0"E
29°0'0"E
29°30'0"E
30°0'0
0°30'0"S
1°0'0"S
1°30'0"S
2°0'0"S
Lake Edward
LUBERO
Kirumba
On 4 January, M23 seized the town of Masisi with the operational support of RDF. On 8 January, FARDC, FDNB, Wazalendo and FDLR launched a counteroffensive, temporarily reclaiming Masisi until the M23 regained control the following day.
UGANDA
WALIKALE
NORD-KIVU
RUTSHURU
Masisi
MASISI
Sake
Mubambiro
Bweremana
Goma
Minova
In mid-January, M23 started expanding its operations in South Kivu, capturing several localities in Kalehe territory and gaining control over the western shore of lake Kivu. RDF troops played a prominent role in capturing Minova and Bweremana, effectively cutting off an important supply route to Sake, Mubambiro and Goma.
SUD-KIVU
KALEHE
Lake Kivu
IDJWI
RWANDA
Kigali
KABARE
0
25
50 km
M23 area of control
M23 approximate expanded area of control
captured locations
M23 advances
The names shown and designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
Created: 8 August 2025 Authors: ISDSS/HRIB/OHCHR Sources: OFFMK/OHCHR, ITE-DRC, OCHA, OSM, CTP, UN SALB, other open sources Contact: offmk@un.org

Annex II


UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
DEM. REP. OF THE CONGO: Capture of Goma
OHCHR Fact-Finding Mission on the South and North Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (OFFMK)
August 2025
23-26 January 2025
M23 and RDF launched a land attack against Sake and Mubambiro on 23 January, supported by mortar fire and anti-tank guided missiles from Bweremana peninsula.
M23 and RDF assaults on the western front reached Goma's outskirts but were intially repelled by FARDC and allies.
RUTSHURU
MASISI
NORD-KIVU
NYIRAGONGO
Sake
Mubambiro
GOMA
Goma
RWANDA
Bweremana
Minova
KALEHE
SUD-KIVU
Lake Kivu
0 5 10 km
27-28 January 2025
On 26 January, additional M23 and RDF reinforcements arrived from the North and overwhelmed Congolese defenses. By 27 January, heavy fighting broke out inside Goma as M23 and RDF forces entered from multiple fronts. Witnesses recounted the summary execution of FARDC soldiers who were wounded, captured or had demonstrated clear intent to surrender.
NYIRAGONGO
On 28 January, M23- and RDF secured Goma airpot and announced FARDC's surrender.
NORD-KIVU
GOMA
27 January, mass escape of 4,500 detainees from Munzenze prison.
Lake Kivu
0 1 2 km
M23 area of operations
M23 approximate expansion of operations
M23 territorial advance
M23 and RDF line of attack
captured locations
The names shown and designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
Created: 8 August 2025 Authors: ISDSS/HRIB/OHCHR Sources: OFFMK/OHCHR, ITE-DRC, OCHA, OSM, CTP, UN SALB, other open sources Contact: offmk@un.org

Annex III



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Created: 8 August 2025 Authors: ISDSS/HRIB/OHCHR Sources: OFFMK/OHCHR, ITE-DRC, OCHA, OSM, CTP, UN SALB, other open sources Contact: offmk@un.org

Annex IV

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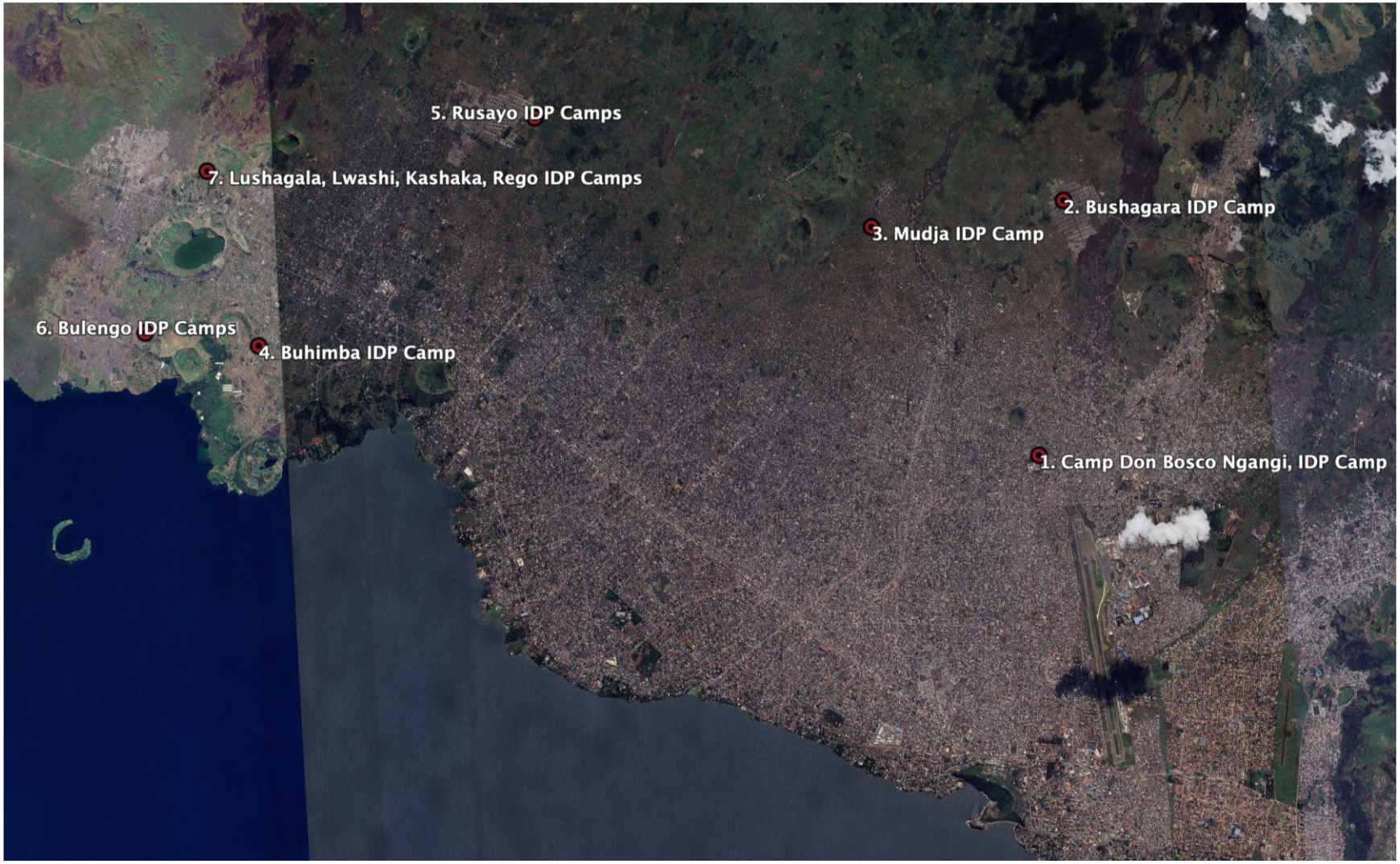
Annex V

Dismantled IDP camps near Goma



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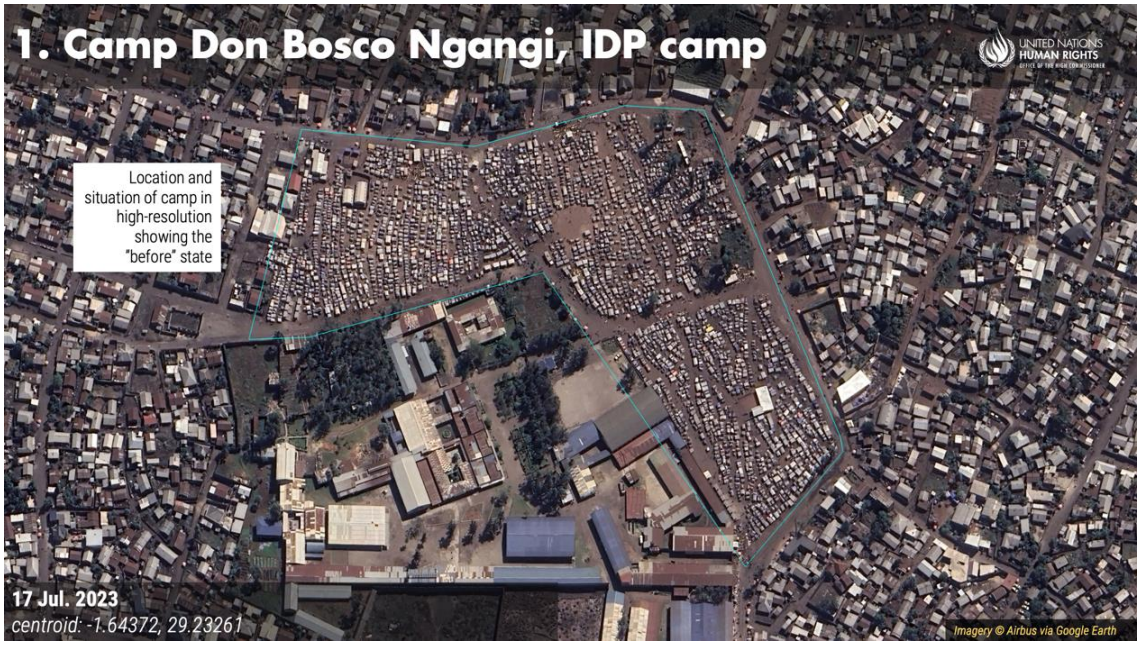
1. Camp Don Bosco Ngangi, IDP camp



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2. Bushagara IDP camp

Image © 2025 Planet Labs enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.

Image © 2025 Planet Labs enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.

3. Mudja IDP Camp

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4. Buhimba IDP Camp

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5. Rusayo IDP Camp

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6. Bulengo IDP Camp

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7. Lushagala, Lwashi, Kashaka, Rego IDP Camps

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Annex VI

Muzenze Central Prison, Goma

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