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DRC: Türk calls for urgent action to stem grave human rights crisis in Goma

28 January 2025

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GENEVA – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk today warned that the human rights crisis in Goma, the capital of the North Kivu region in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has left civilians exposed to gross human rights violations and abuses and serious violations of international humanitarian law. He reminded all parties of their obligations under international law to protect civilians.

The M23 armed group and the Rwanda Defence Forces have been fighting the DRC armed forces, backed by the Wazalendo armed group, in the city of Goma. Shells have landed in at least two sites hosting internally displaced people.

“As violence and urban combat escalate within Goma, civilians face grave risks – including from the use of explosive weapons such as mortars and artillery in populated areas,” the High Commissioner warned.

“Expansion of the violence into other villages and towns will only deepen the already serious human rights crisis,” he added, expressing fears that the fighting could spread to other key cities in North Kivu and to South Kivu Province.

Reports suggest hundreds of thousands of civilians have been displaced since the escalation began, and food, water and electricity supplies are running disastrously low. Access to the Internet and other telecommunication services is also restricted.

“Hundreds of thousands of people who have already endured violence, displacement and difficult living conditions have had to flee yet again,” said the High Commissioner.

Türk also highlighted the risk of a general deterioration in law and order in Goma after an estimated 4,763 prisoners escaped from Muzenze prison, Goma’s largest, on 27 January.

Türk expressed concern about the situation of human rights defenders, journalists and other civil society actors in Goma and called for their safety to be ensured. He also warned of a heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

The UN Human Rights Chief also called for an end to hate speech and ethnically motivated attacks, including on those perceived to be members of the Tutsi ethnic community or considered traitors. He urged all actors, including traditional, religious and political leaders and influencers, to promote social unity.

He reminded all parties to the conflict that their actions are being monitored, and that they will be held accountable for all serious violations and crimes they commit.

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