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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Report of the OHCHR Fact-Finding Mission on the situation in North and South Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo*

Summary

This report is submitted to the Human Rights Council pursuant to resolution A/HRC/RES/S-37/1, mandating the establishment by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights of a fact-finding mission to investigate alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law (IHRL) and violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and potential international crimes in the context of the most recent escalation of hostilities in the North and South Kivu provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It 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 annex to the present report is circulated in the language of submission only.

I. Introduction

1. On 7 February 2025, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution [A/HRC/RES/S-37/1](#) requesting the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to urgently establish a fact-finding mission (FFM) mandated *inter alia* to investigate and establish the facts, circumstances, and root causes of all alleged IHRL violations and abuses, as well as IHL violations and potential international crimes committed in the context of the recent escalation of hostilities in North and South Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

II. Scope, methodology and standard of proof

2. The FFM operated from the United Nations Regional Service Centre in Entebbe, Uganda, and conducted missions to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi from March to August 2025. The FFM thanks these Governments for their cooperation throughout the missions. The FFM regrettably was not granted access to refugee sites in Uganda, with its national authorities citing security concerns. The FFM was also denied access to Goma by M23's leadership and could therefore not visit areas controlled by the M23.

3. Despite these restrictions, the FFM conducted over 280 interviews with victims and witnesses – 170 men and 110 women and gender-diverse persons –, as well as meetings with civil society representatives, national authorities, and representatives of 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 FFM rigorously assessed the credibility of each source and verified the validity and consistency of the information provided, in accordance with OHCHR methodology. Only findings meeting the threshold “reasonable grounds to believe” were included in the report. The FFM applied a victim-centered approach and took all possible measures to mitigate risks of reprisals against individuals engaging with it.

5. Given time constraints and to prioritise the most urgent protection concerns, the FFM focused on identifying patterns of violations and abuses in the context of the escalation of hostilities between January and July 2025. The FFM's work is also intended to serve as a foundation for the Commission of Inquiry mandated by the same resolution to in turn conduct comprehensive investigations into events since 2022. The FFM 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 FFM reviewed and considered.

III. Context

A. Background: reemergence of M23 in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (2021–2024)

6. In November 2021, eight years after being initially defeated, M23 launched several attacks in North Kivu, citing the stalled implementation of the 2013 Nairobi Agreements¹ – especially on demobilization and reintegration² – 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 Rutshuru and Nyiragongo territories, and most of Masisi, including mining areas, with reports of serious human rights abuses and IHL violations.³

8. Since 2022, several UN reports⁴ have pointed to an active role of Rwanda in 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 its direct involvement with M23,⁵ including in response to this report.

9. In response to M23's advances, Congolese authorities issued calls for armed mobilization in late 2022⁶ 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* (VDP), aligning in the fight against M23. The Government sought to formalize this mobilization through the creation of the *Réserve armée de défense* (RAD)⁷ and by arming and financing Wazalendo, and other allied armed groups – including the FDLR⁸ – to conduct joint operations with Congolese armed forces (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 abuses¹¹ – contributed to further violations and abuses and seriously undermined accountability efforts. Furthermore, the active support to and participation of FDLR elements in FARDC operations against M23 exacerbated tensions with Rwanda, while the involvement of the Burundi National Defense Force (FNDB) deployed under bilateral and regional arrangements in combat against the RED-Tabara and Twirwaneho armed groups – both of which also allegedly supported by Rwanda¹² – 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 people – nearly half of them children – and triggered one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the region.¹⁴

³ A/HRC/54/73, para. 25.

⁴ S/2022/479, para. 67; S/2024/432, paras. 40 to 45; S/2025/446, paras. 34 to 56.

⁵ S/2022/479, annex 39.

⁶ President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in [address to nation](#) (3 November 2022) "invited [the youth] to organize themselves into vigilance groups, with a view to supporting, accompanying, and assisting [the] defense and security forces"

⁷ Law n° 23/014 of 22 May 2023. The RAD is yet to be operationalised.

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

⁹ "Wazalendo" is used for both Wazalendo and VDP groups.

¹⁰ S/2023/990.

¹¹ E.g., Nduma Defense of Congo *Rénové* (NDC-R) was legitimized as a VDP, despite UN sanctions and an arrest warrant of Congolese authorities against its leader on accusations of war crimes. Nyatura armed group rebranded as VDP, despite being having committed most human rights abuses in North Kivu in 2021, according to [UNJHRO](#).

¹² S/2025/446.

¹³ April 2022: "Nairobi process" - dialogue between the Congolese government and armed groups. July 2024: "Luanda Process" - ceasefire agreement, FDLR neutralization and Rwanda's disengagement.

¹⁴ [UNHCR](#)

B. Territorial expansion of M23 (January–February 2025)

12. From late 2024, M23, with training, material, intelligence and operational support from the Rwandan Defense Forces (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 (SAMIDRC), as well as private military companies contracted by the Congolese Government.¹⁵ On 27 January, M23 and RDF troops entered Goma on multiple fronts, sparking intense clashes and heavy artillery exchanges.¹⁶ Many civilians were killed in the course of these developments, while hundreds of civilians and disarmed FARDC received protection in MONUSCO bases. Amid this, over 4,500 detainees escaped from Goma’s Munzenze central prison, including 1,497 held for serious crimes, including IHL and IHRL 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 defenses. By 29 January, M23 and RDF had taken full control of the city.

14. In early February, with RDF support, M23 continued advancing 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 individuals supportive of M23.²²

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

C. FARDC and Wazalendo clashes (February–May 2025)

17. In South Kivu, emerging tensions between retreating FARDC and local Wazalendo groups escalated into violent clashes in Kamanyola and Uvira on the Burundian border in mid-February, 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,

¹⁵ S/2025/446, para. 74.

¹⁶ See annexes I and II.

¹⁷ See annex III.

¹⁸ 2,285 inmates fled the central prison in Bukavu and 221 escaped from the Kabare prison (source: UNJHRO).

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

²⁰ S/2025/446 annex 18.

²¹ Source: BBC

²² S/2025/446 annex 17.

²³ FFM’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 this claim in its response to this report.

²⁴ Source: Government.

Wazalendo members progressively consolidated their presence in these 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, which reaffirmed the commitment by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to neutralize FDLR and by Rwanda to disengage its forces and lift defensive measures, while acknowledging shared responsibility to both Governments to cease any support to non-state armed groups.²⁶ This was followed, on 19 July, by a Declaration of Principles between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and M23 in Doha, committing to reaching a comprehensive peace agreement by 18 August.

19. These 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 *chefferie* (Rutshuru) – a predominantly Hutu area and traditional FDLR stronghold – in which 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 and South Kivu is characterized by several non-international armed conflicts between FARDC and multiple armed groups, between the RDF and armed groups and between different armed groups. They are governed by Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, customary rules of IHL and, where relevant, Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, to which the Democratic Republic of the Congo is party. In parallel, the international armed conflict (IAC) opposing the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda triggered the application of the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I, to which both States are parties, as well as customary rules of IHL. Rwanda's extensive support 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 IAC.

21. IHRL 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 and ensure the human rights established therein to all individuals in its territory, including taking available steps to protect all persons in its territory against 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 Rwanda's obligations under IHL as a party to armed conflict,³⁰ the presence of RDF elements on Congolese territory, as well as their support to M23, raises the question as to whether Rwanda assumed additional obligations as an occupying power under IHL. Occupation existed if Rwanda exercised the requisite degree of control over parts of North and South Kivu during the period under review, either through the effective control of

²⁵ See paras. 63 to 65.

²⁶ [Peace Agreement between DRC and Rwanda](#), 27 June 2025, para 1.

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

²⁸ See para. 31.

²⁹ OHCHR.

³⁰ In its response to this report, Rwanda refuted being part of the conflict.

territory by RDF or through exercising overall control over M23 as a proxy force.³¹ In addition, Rwanda has extra-territorial obligations under IHRL towards persons outside its territory but within its power or effective control. This includes 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 UN peacekeepers were also killed, allegedly in a targeted attack by M23 and RDF.³²

24. Cross-border shelling between the 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 FFM was unable to corroborate civilian casualties nor assess the legality of these attacks as a matter of IHL. Information collected, however, suggests FARDC failed to adequately distinguish military objectives during these exchanges.

25. The FFM documented several attacks on displacement sites around Goma. For example, on 24 January, multiple projectiles, including a 122mm rocket, struck the Rusayo IDP 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 IDP sites, exposing IDPs to significant risk and raising concerns regarding the obligation to take precautions to protect the population from effects of attacks. Such conduct, however, did not relieve other parties of their own obligations under IHL.

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 motorbikes at intersections or approaching checkpoints, without any apparent attempt to stop them. Other witnesses recounted the summary execution of FARDC soldiers who were wounded, captured or had demonstrated clear intent to surrender. Such acts, if verified, may amount to war crimes.

27. The FFM 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 FFM could not identify the perpetrator of these explosions. 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 and over 60 have been used by parties to the conflict for military purposes, with the latter exposing the schools to targeting and exposing children to the risk of explosive remnants of war. Medical facilities were also impacted. 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 pediatric ward of Walungu Hospital, killing five people including two children. Under IHL, hospitals benefit from special protection and must not be attacked, looted, or their functioning disrupted.

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

³² [Spokesman for the Secretary-General](#).

³³ Source: Government of Rwanda.

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 disappearances against the civilian population, carried out with the stated objective of restoring order, security and stability.³⁴ While some victims were targeted based on suspected affiliations with the Government, FARDC, Wazalendo or FDLR, similar violation and abuses were also widely committed against any civilian seen as representing a threat to order, security and stability, such as those perceived as criminals, Government supporters or critics of M23. These 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. “*People die like flies*”, several interviewees stated, denouncing the normalization of killings under M23’s 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 (South Kivu), 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 Bishwa *chefferie* in Rutshuru and allegedly executed hundreds of civilians—mainly Hutu’s.³⁵ Survivors described assailants killing men, women, children, including infants, and the elderly with machetes and axes. Given time constraints the FFM could not fully investigate these incidents.

32. Since January, M23 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 below 18, were executed during such operations in the Kasika neighborhood of Goma on 22 and 23 February. Armed M23 members went from door to door rounding up local youth, allegedly on accusations of criminality, and killed most victims at point blank range. Others were shot while attempting to flee.³⁷

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 stating to bystanders that “*no indiscipline will be tolerated*”.

34. The FFM recorded 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 and holding her two young children in April. They shot at her and the two children while she pleaded for mercy, killing all three.

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

³⁴ AFC Secretariat, [AFC/M23’s reaction to allegations human rights violations in the Goma and Bukavu](#), May 2025.

³⁵ OHCHR reported M23 killed at least 319 civilians in Rutshuru from 9 - 21 July.

³⁶ See paras. 38 to 41.

³⁷ Number of victims is likely higher, some reporting up to 50 people killed during operations. E.g. [S/2025/446](#), annex 49.

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 by threats from its senior officials. The FFM documented summary executions, enforced disappearances, *incommunicado* detention, torture, and death threats, as well as 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 to inform themselves on alternative viewpoints, in violation of the rights 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 secrecy or cease reporting and other protected activities altogether. This 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 denunciations driven by personal motives, deepening a generalized climate of fear and mistrust in the population.

C. Detention and enforced disappearances

38. M23 detained thousands of civilians, primarily during cordon-and-search operations conducted almost daily since January. Initially presented as “security measures” to track down remnants of FARDC soldiers and allies, these operations evolved into a systematic campaign of detentions also targeting people with family or other real or perceived ties with them, members of civil society, and people accused of offences or commonly associated with criminality. In at least four incidents in Goma, M23 also 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 able-bodied 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 FFM 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 remains unknown.

41. The FFM 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 due to the escalating violence. On 17 February, AFC/M23 issued instructions³⁹ giving a one-week ultimatum for parents to retrieve their children. Similar threats continued through July, warning of punishment for street youth involved in crime. Some children have been arrested despite committing no offense and held together with adults.

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

42. The FFM confirmed widespread torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatments, including sexual violence, inflicted against individuals held in M23-run detention

³⁸ See paras. 45 to 48.

³⁹ Source: Written and verbal instructions issued by *de facto* authorities and collected by the FFM.

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 otherwise 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 crimes they had not committed. Torture and other forms of ill-treatment were inflicted with the apparent intent to intimidate and punish.

44. The FFM identified several improvised detention sites in North and South Kivu, including shipping containers, underground cells or government buildings.⁴⁰ Some of those sites served as transit places before detainees were sent to M23’s “training” camps. Accounts indicated that some guards were Rwandans. The FFM also received credible information that senior M23 commanders, including M23’s military leader, were present at some of these detention sites. Their names have been retained 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 out of fear 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 joined under false promises of employment. Adolescent boys reported to be around 15 and older, and young men were particularly targeted to bolster M23’s ranks, with no age verification conducted.

46. Individuals forcefully 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 to four months, before being reportedly deployed to the front line. Survivors and witnesses reported thousands of men, and some women and children forced to carry out intensive labour, including digging and clearing roads, cutting and transporting wood, and fetching 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 in some cases to death – and others died from exhaustion, dehydration, or hunger. Guards from Tshanzu removed women from their enclosures 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 were displayed as a warning. “*Tshanzu was hell*”, a survivor reported.

48. Survivors’ accounts, corroborated by M23-released video footage, identified high-ranking M23 officers who were present at those camps. Recruits further stated that most of their instructors and guards were Rwandan nationals, including some RDF members in uniforms.

⁴⁰ See annex IV.

⁴¹ The FFM received information on possible other camps.

F. Widespread conflict-related sexual violence

49. The FFM verified cases of sexual violence by M23. Some victims recounted being raped or gang-raped in their homes alongside their mothers, daughters or sisters. A victim recounted M23 conducting house-to-house searches looking for FARDC soldiers in Katindo neighborhood, 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 rape and other abuses.

50. Cases of sexual violence were also documented in detention. Women, men, boys and LGBT individuals were subjected to gang rapes while detained in M23 improvised 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, perpetrated either by M23 guards or by co-detainees with the instigation, or acquiescence of *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 IDPs living in camps around the city to dismantle their shelters and return to their villages.⁴² IDPs 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 to be killed by M23. Photographs, videos and satellite imagery showed camps around Goma completely emptied in a matter of days.⁴³ Many IDPs ended up living in the streets, in schools, in churches or hosted by families, with limited or no access to humanitarian aid.

52. The FFM also documented that some displaced families who had returned to their places of origin were thereupon 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 threatened that if they did not comply, “*the Red Cross would come to collect [their] bodies*”.

53. The FFM 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 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 presented them to 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 center in Goma run by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) after the same M23 officials 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 center 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,

⁴² End of February over 500,000 IDPs had been displaced from pre-existing sites in Goma and the outskirts of Nyiragongo territory (IOM).

⁴³ See annex V.

⁴⁴ RFI and UNHCR.

on 25 February.⁴⁵ Forcibly displacing or deporting civilians amounts to a war crime, unless their security or imperative military reasons so demand.⁴⁶

VII. Patterns of violations by FARDC, Wazalendo and affiliated groups

A. Conflict-related sexual violence

55. The FFM identified a pattern of widespread use of sexual violence and looting by members of FARDC and Wazalendo during their retreat from the frontlines 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. 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 frontline, as responsible for multiple incidents of sexual violence and looting. Perpetrators operated in large groups and in multiple localities simultaneously, in a manner that reflected recurring patterns of rape and looting, rather than isolated acts.

58. While Wazalendo members often seem to have regarded pillage as a form of self-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 FFM often described FARDC soldiers as “*bandits*” and denounced the “*brutality*” of those retreating from Bukavu.

B. Summary executions

59. The FFM documented deliberate killings of civilians by FARDC after in-fighting with Wazalendo, often in retaliation for victims’ presumed support to Wazalendo. From 15 to 17 February, soldiers from the FARDC’s ‘*Guépard*’ and ‘*Satan II*’ units summarily executed at least 20 civilians in Kamanyola, South Kivu, after hundreds of their troops died during clashes with Wazalendo. Most victims – men and teenage 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 this requires further investigation.

C. Recruitment and use of children

60. The FFM received consistent evidence of recruitment and use of children under 18 by Wazalendo groups. Community mobilization campaigns with door-to-door visits and mass gatherings were conducted, particularly between February and April in Fizi territory, South Kivu, during which boys and girls were encouraged to enroll to “save their homeland from

⁴⁵ See para. 52.

⁴⁶ Article 17(2) of Additional Protocol II; ICRC, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, Volume I: Rules, Rule 129(B), Article 8(2)(e)(viii) Rome Statute.

⁴⁷ Source: civil society.

⁴⁸ Source: Government of Democratic Republic of the Congo.

foreign forces”. Recruited children were used as fighters, messengers, escorts, for domestic tasks, and in roles involving surveillance or espionage.

61. According to verified witness accounts, boys visibly 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, as well as in support functions such as cooks or messengers. 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 exposed to high risks of being killed, either as a result of their active participation in hostilities or of being perceived as such. The FFM examined allegations of at least six such children killed when M23 entered Bukavu but could not determine the precise circumstances of their deaths.

D. Restrictions on freedom of movement, discrimination and hate speech

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, South Kivu. They established parallel administrative and judicial structures, conducted informal trials and carried out illegal arrests. The FFM 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 FFM received reports indicating systematic discrimination against IDPs from the Bashi community, who were forced to pay more than other ethnic communities at checkpoints. Wazalendo groups targeted Bashi IDPs 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 FFM received multiple reports of members of the Tutsi community being killed, and others being denied access to local markets on ethnic grounds.

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 humanitarians,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 FFM verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) 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, taken to an unknown location to become the “wife” of an FDLR element who raped her for two days. Women and girls became pregnant

⁴⁹ Rome Statute, Art. 8.2.e. (vii).

⁵⁰ e.g. UNFPA, MSF and Action Aid

⁵¹ Source: UNICEF.

or died from the consequences of rape. Some were killed for resisting. Rapes were often carried out in presence of family members, at gunpoint and accompanied by death threats, severe physical violence, abductions, 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 as well as LGBT individuals were also recorded, although these remain largely unreported. For example, the FFM 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, homo-transphobic insults against and public humiliation of an LGBT individual by Wazalendo members was also documented.

69. The FFM confirmed that, during the mass escape from Munzenze prison on 27 January, most of the 160 women inmates – along with numerous infants – died, and that an undetermined number were gang-raped, in some cases in front of their children, by male inmates who had forced their way into the women's ward. 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 that incident.⁵³

70. According to the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNJHRO), 199 persons who were convicted of sexual and gender-based crimes escaped from Bukavu, Kabare and Goma prisons.⁵⁴ Their escape, as well as that of those convicted of other serious crimes, has placed victims and witnesses at heightened risk of reprisals. For example, the FFM confirmed repeated rapes, other ill-treatment and death threats by an escapee previously convicted by national judicial authorities against victims and human rights defenders who had testified against him in court.

71. Numerous women and girls reported enduring severe physical and psychological pain, and risks of life-long 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-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 stigma. 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 FFM finds that there are reasonable grounds to believe that since January 2025, all parties to the conflict in North and South Kivu have committed gross human rights violations and abuses and serious violations of IHL, 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.

⁵² See annex VI.

⁵³ Source: Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

⁵⁴ Source: UNJHRO.

A. War crimes

74. More specifically, the FFM found reasonable grounds to believe that M23 members, and in some cases RDF soldiers, committed war crimes involving violence to life and persons, in particular murder, willful killing, cruel treatment and torture, outrages upon personal dignity, particularly humiliating and degrading treatment, unlawful confinement and the taking of hostages. The FFM also found that M23 members 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 committed the war crimes of violence to life and persons, in particular murder, cruel treatment and torture, pillage, rape, and sexual slavery, and that certain Wazalendo members and leaders 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 FFM 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 FFM collected a reliable information that since January, M23 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 carried out rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual slavery – primarily targeting women and girls – along with torture, other forms of ill-treatment and summary executions on a widespread scale in their efforts to track down real or perceived security or reputational threats. These 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 the M23, regarded as a threat to its notion of order and security, or deemed fit to fight or serve the movement. They occurred daily across the entirety of the territory under M23’s control and followed discernible, recurring patterns, indicating a high degree of organization, planning, and resource mobilization. The FFM finds that there are strong indications that these were carried out in furtherance of an organizational policy aimed at strengthening the movement’s forces, consolidating control over newly captured areas, and asserting own notions of ‘order and security’ by eliminating any perceived threats to its authority.⁵⁵

78. The FFM 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 ‘*Satan II*’ and ‘*Guépard*’ units repeatedly entered homes, looted property, and raped civilians, following a consistent pattern across multiple locations and over a wide geographic area. The scale, geographic spread, number of victims, and repetitive nature of these 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 FFM is unable to conclude, to the relevant standard, whether these acts occurred in course of an attack carried out pursuant to or in furtherance of a State policy.⁵⁶ Further investigation of this serious issue is also warranted. Irrespective of the classification under international criminal law, there is urgent need for accountability for such conduct. The FFM 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

⁵⁵ Art. 7(1) Rome Statute.

⁵⁶ Art. 7(2) (a) Rome Statute.

conditions that further facilitated and abetted commission of unlawful acts against civilians. Members of the ‘*Satan II*’ and ‘*Guépard*’ units, in particular, had been known previously for engaging in such acts.⁵⁷

C. Identification of perpetrators

79. The FFM compiled initial dossiers identifying possible individuals, units and entities 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 at level of senior officials, others were unable to identify perpetrators’ names, ranks, positions, units, or affiliations, but could only provide limited indications, such as type of uniform or language spoken. The FFM 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 those forces’ 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 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 FFM 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.

82. While further investigation is necessary to assess the degree of control Rwanda exercised over the M23, the FFM found evidence that it has provided, at a minimum, consistent and significant military, logistical and material support. The direct involvement of RDF played a pivotal role in M23’s territorial expansion, specifically in the takeover of Goma. This 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 however appears to have failed to use its leverage, as required by its obligations under Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions to ensure respect for IHL.⁵⁹ Rwanda also appears to have violated its obligations under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) to take all feasible measures to prevent the recruitment and use of children under 18 by M23.⁶⁰

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.⁶¹ For many violations, the FFM lacked sufficient information to show the necessary level of direction or control. The assessment was complicated by Wazalendo groups’ fragmented nature and varying degrees of autonomy from the FARDC. However, the FFM notes that the Congolese Government initiated a programme, instituted without adequate safeguards and oversight, to legitimize, arm and collaborate with these non-state

⁵⁷ Source: MONUSCO.

⁵⁸ A/56/10, Art. 7; ICRC Customary Law Study, Rule 149; ICCPR, Art. 2(1).

⁵⁹ ICRC Customary Law Study, Rule 144.

⁶⁰ Art. 4 OPAC.

⁶¹ A/56/10, Art. 5 and 8.

actors – many of which were known for committing IHL violations and IHRL abuses – prioritizing immediate defense concerns over protection of civilians and structural reforms. This strategy, in view of the FFM, reflects a breach of its obligations under Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions to ensure respect for IHL, and its obligation under IHRL to take available steps to protect its own population from serious harm.⁶²

84. As a State party to OPAC, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is required to take all feasible steps to prevent the recruitment of children under 18 by armed groups.⁶³ While noting positive steps taken in recent years – which led to the FARDC being delisted in 2017 from the annex of the UN Secretary-General’s Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict for the recruitment of children⁶⁴ – the FFM 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.⁶⁵

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 (ICC) is undertaking vitally important investigations further to its own jurisdiction, which must be supported and sustained, these 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 armed groups’ commanders in high profile cases in 2024.⁶⁶ The FFM also recognizes the important efforts made to combat CRSV, 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 IHL and IHRL within the 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 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. Also worryingly, during a wave of jailbreaks in early 2025 thousands of individuals, including individuals convicted of international crimes escaped, many of whom now pose grave risks to victims and 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 important structural reforms needed to address the root causes of impunity, including chronic underfunding and lack of independence of judicial institutions and the weak protection of victims and witnesses. The FFM 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 FFM is concerned about delays in its operationalization and lack of payouts to victims.⁶⁷

⁶² Human Rights Committee, General Comments, 31 and 36.

⁶³ Art. 4 OPAC.

⁶⁴ [A/72/361](#), para. 246.

⁶⁵ In February 2025, the Congolese Ministry of Defense instructed armed forces to refrain from recruiting children, though this was not enforced against Wazalendo groups.

⁶⁶ Source: UNJHRO.

⁶⁷ Law 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.

88. These shortcomings are further compounded by the absence of reference to 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 on 27 June. It would be 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 respect IHL, IHRL and the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo,⁶⁸ the M23 has not taken measures to prevent or sanction IHRL and IHL violations in the territory under its control. As detailed in this report, M23's 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 FFM's knowledge, no such measures have been taken to date.

XI. Conclusion

91. The findings of the FFM 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 new reports of violations continuing, both the Congolese and Rwandan Governments must take urgent actions 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 pressing needs 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 committed in the Kivus will perpetuate recurring cycles of violence and further endanger national and regional stability.

93. Given the scale of additional allegations of IHRL and IHL violations from the resurgence of M23 in 2021 until the end of 2024 – which were not documented in this 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 by resolution [A/HRC/RES/S-37/1](#).

XII. Recommendations

To all parties to conflict:

- Ensure full respect for IHL; take all feasible precautions to avoid and/or minimize civilian harm; and cease the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas.
- Immediately end sexual violence and take all necessary measures to prevent and protect all individuals from such acts.
- Immediately halt the recruitment of boys and girls, release all persons under 18 recruited, and withdraw from schools occupied or used for military purposes.
- Release civilians arbitrarily or unlawfully detained, disclose their fate and whereabouts. Ensure humane treatment of detainees, access to legal counsel and communication with families, grant independent monitors access to all places of detention, including to so-called “training” camps, military and intelligence facilities.

⁶⁸ Idem footnote 32.

To Congolese authorities:

- Ensure timely, independent and impartial investigations into alleged IHRL violations and abuses and IHL violations; hold all perpetrators accountable.
- Cease all forms of material support to FDLR, Wazalendo and other armed groups engaged in the current conflict alongside FARDC forces.
- Fully integrate accountability and transitional justice in peace negotiations and agreements with all relevant parties.
- 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.
- 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.
- Provide support to children separated from armed groups and foster their long-term reintegration into society.
- Accelerate comprehensive security sector reforms addressing persistent structural weaknesses within the armed forces and security institutions, including alleged corruption, underfunding and lack of accountability.
- Establish a rigorous vetting mechanism with independent and transparent process to prevent the recruitment or integration into national security forces, including the RAD, of individuals implicated in serious crimes, and accountability.

To Rwandan authorities:

- Cease all forms of support to M23 facilitating or otherwise materially contributing to its operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- Conduct prompt, transparent, independent and impartial investigations into all alleged human rights violations and abuses and violations of IHL committed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by the RDF, M23, and other armed groups supported by Rwanda, and ensure those responsible are held accountable.
- 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.

To the international community:

- Support mediation initiatives and peace processes for sustainable solutions, including by addressing its root causes. Maintain pressure on Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda to cease support to non-State armed groups and engage in negotiations, in good faith.
- Integrate comprehensive victim-centered measures for truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition in peace negotiations and ensure a meaningful participation of women and youth.
- Ensure full financial resources are made available through the United Nation's regular budget for the Independent Commission of Inquiry mandated by the Human Rights Council to be able to fulfill its mandate.
- Support ICC investigations with respect to the conflicts in North and South Kivu.
- Support humanitarian organizations to ensure holistic and non-discriminatory delivery of assistance, especially to victims of sexual violence and children.

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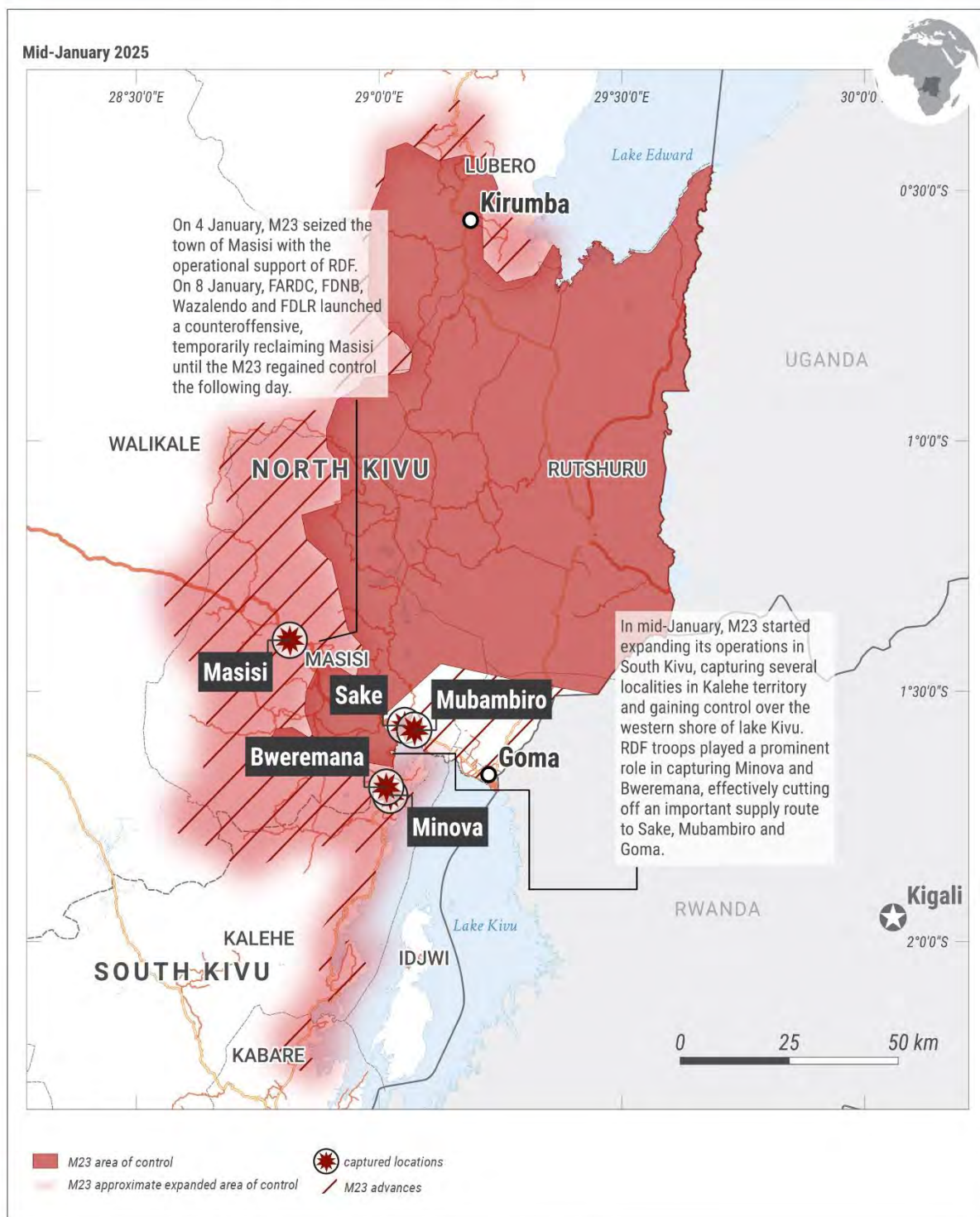
Annex I



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



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, DSM, CTP, other open sources Contact: offmk@un.org

Annex II

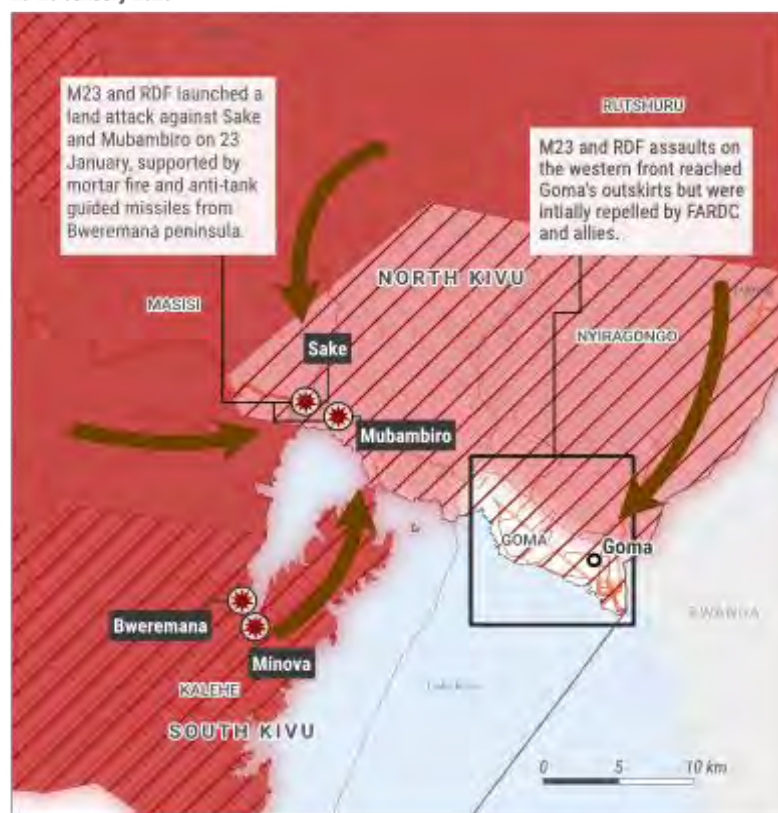


DEM. REP. OF THE CONGO: Capture of Goma

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 area of operations
 M23 territorial advance
 captured locations
 M23 approximate expansion of operations
 M23 and RDF line of attack

The names shown and designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

27-28 January 2025



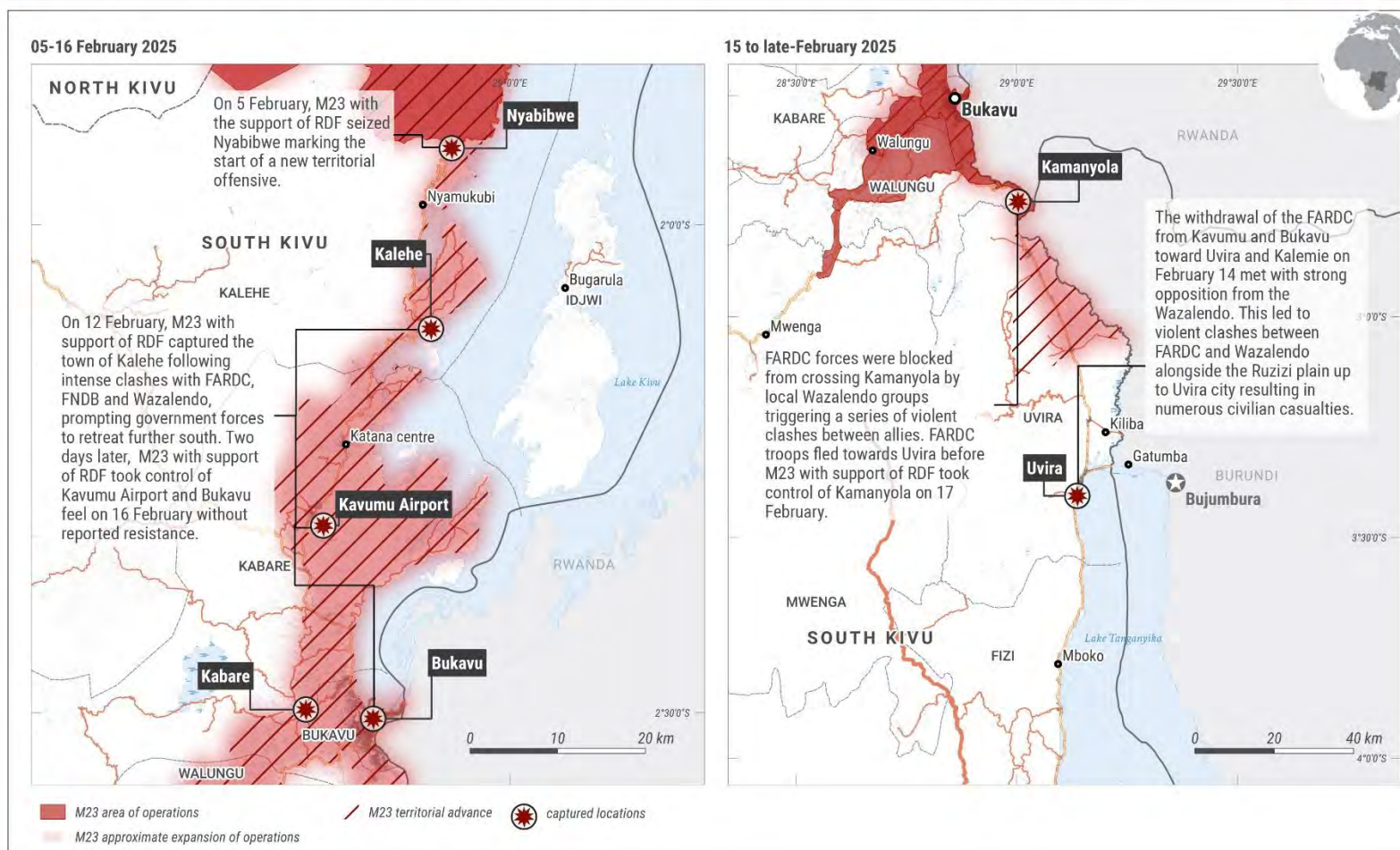
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DEM. REP. OF THE CONGO: Expansion of conflict to South Kivu

OHCHR Fact-Finding Mission on the South and North Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (OFFMK)

August 2025



The names shown and designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

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Annex IV



DEM. REP. OF THE CONGO: Sites of detention and "training" camps of the M23

OHCHR Fact-Finding Mission on the South and North Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (OFFMK)

August 2025



The names shown and designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

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Annex V - Dismantled IDP camps near Goma



Image © 2025 Airbus via Google Earth enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.

1. Camp Don Bosco Ngangi, IDP camp



Image © 2025 Airbus via Google Earth



Image © 2025 Planet Labs enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.

2. Bushagara IDP camp



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Image © 2025 Planet Labs enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.

3. Mudja IDP Camp



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Image © 2025 Planet Labs enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.

4. Buhimba IDP Camp



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Image © 2025 Planet Labs enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.

5. Rusayo IDP Camp



Image © 2025 Planet Labs enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.



Image © 2025 Planet Labs enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.

6. Bulengo IDP Camp



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Image © 2025 Planet Labs enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.

7. Lushagala, Lwashi, Kashaka, Rego IDP Camps



Image © 2025 Planet Labs enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.



Image © 2025 Planet Labs enhanced by OHCHR digital forensics.

Annex VI – Munzenze Central Prison, Goma



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