



# The national and regional conflicts of the DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo is located at the center of the African continent and since the beginning of its history international actors have played important roles in the national decisions and in its stability. In the past years conflicts in the countries have escalated and once again international actors play a central role.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo has been worsening in the past months, especially in the eastern provinces of Ituri, North-Kivu and South Kivu. A decrease in social and personal safety, in fact, has been paired with an increase in food insecurity, interpreted in a global context as a part of the spill over effects of the conflict in Ukraine; Furthermore, the number of internally displaced people has augmented drastically in recent months. At this moment, this crisis is considered to be 'Africa's longest and more complex'.(UNHCR)



*Source: the global guardian 2022.*

*The picture shows the eastern regions of the DRC.*

## ***Recent dynamics***

On the 5th of February, a peacekeeper from South Africa was killed. The rebel movement M23 has started to seize many areas, conquering more and more villages, leaving people without their home, forcing creation and expansion of unplanned settlements in various places such as churches, schools, warehouses, etc. As a direct consequence, the number of internally displaced people is rising in the country, which already has the highest count of IDP in the whole African continent. This is being the cause of incredible human suffering since these people are living in precarious situations with no proper shelter, nutrition, education, and hygiene systems. The lack of these fundamental services puts the people living in these camps under threats of illnesses, such as cholera, and exposes the most vulnerable to high risks of violence. Even leaving the settlements is becoming dangerous, since rebel groups are surrounding them, so people are

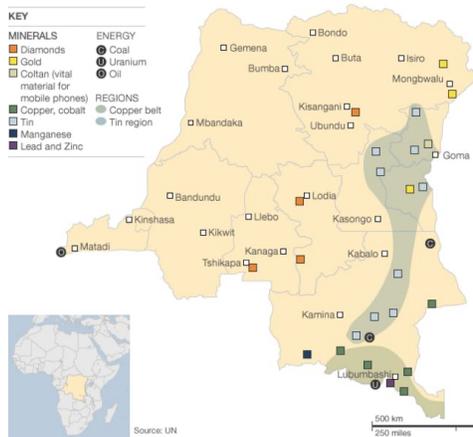


struggling to get the resources they need to survive. Moreover, these people are left with the uncertainty of not knowing if they will ever be able to return home given the rising dominance of the M23. The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service has decided, on the 27th of February, to suspend its services, meaning that they will stop providing humanitarian assistance in the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu due to a recent attack against one of their helicopters and the lack of security. Unfortunately, this will put millions of people living in IDP settlements in even greater danger and deprive them from basic humanitarian aid. To add on this spiral of violence, one hundred and twenty rebel groups are also present in the regions, actively fighting against one another and committing terrible atrocities. Finally, the situation has gotten even worse due to not only a new Ebola outbreak, but also the terrible floods that have hit the region in late 2022, which have been the worst in the country since 2019, causing around 200 deaths and affecting 20.000 people.

### *The region of east DRC*

This region includes the different provinces of Ituri, North and South Kivu, which are hosting as many as 1.5 million internally displaced people and contain the largest number of unplanned IDP settlements (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023). The roots of such regional instability can be found in the 1994 Rwandan genocide; given its geographical proximity and shared border, the provinces suffered from the spillover effects of the conflict. In fact, some groups

in the region are still fighting for ethnic reasons. An example can be found in the clash between the Tutsi-led M23 movement and the Hutu FDLR paramilitary group, instrumentalized by the government to fight the M23 movement and whose members are suspected of having taken part in the Rwandan genocide. Brutalities and absence of a strong rule of law have been present in the area for thirty years, creating structural violence within society and making it extremely hard for the government of the DRC to take down all the rebel groups and find long-lasting peace solutions. Another important aspect of the region is its abundance in natural resources, the most important being Tin, Tungsten, Tantalum, Coltan, and Gold; the first ones are used to make components of electronic devices and therefore considered incredibly valuable. Criminal organizations are using illegal mining and commerce of these resources to sustain themselves economically and are thus in need of maintaining some degree of territorial control. The international community has tried multiple times to intervene to try to stop this illicit trafficking to help the government of the DRC to regain control. For instance, in 2010 The United States of America passed the Conflict Mineral Trade Act to try to reduce the purchases of minerals coming from these areas, to stop the conflict but, when miners found themselves without a job due to the declining demand, the level of violence increased even more due to a lack of alternative employment.



Source: United Nations.

The picture shows the types of minerals in the DRC.

### ***A complicated relation- Rwanda***

A clear understanding of the current situation must stem from a comprehension of the conflict's roots; therefore, it is imperative to correctly frame the present dynamics in the context of the DRC's history and its connection with neighbouring Rwanda. Since 1994, the relations between the two countries have consistently been complicated, especially in the late 90s when Rwanda invaded the DRC twice in five years. The 2019 election of the new Congolese President

Tshisekedi, however, marked the beginning of a period of detente. In fact, the two governments started to grow closer to the point of signing agreements on important topics such as taxation, investment, and management of gold. Nevertheless, their relations started deteriorating as Kigali began to feel isolated and sceptical over the close ties that

were being built between Kinshasa and Kampala. In fact, the president of Uganda started to undertake several initiatives to collaborate with the DRC: for instance, he has started to rehabilitate roads in Eastern Congo to better connect the region with Uganda bypassing Rwanda. The two governments also have a common enemy, the ADF (Allied Democratic Forces), an Islamic terrorist group that can be found in the border between the countries. In late 2021, Uganda was even able to place some of its troops inside Eastern Congo in order to fight against them. The president of Rwanda, however, interpreted the legal placement of Ugandan troops in the region as a personal attack, given that his own country does not enjoy the same permission. His unwillingness to accept what from a Rwandan point of view was an unfair double standard turned the agreement between Uganda and Congo into a detonator of conflict. At the beginning of 2022, Kagame held a speech in the parliament threatening the use of force; later on, in March, the M23 movement started to attack strategic positions of the FARDC (Armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo), one of them being Bunagana, the hub of trade between Uganda and the DRC. The last days of March 2022 marked a crucial moment in the history of the Great Lakes region, not only because the M23 rebel group came back from its dormant period, but also because the DRC formally became a Member State of the East African Community. Since then, the rising tensions became not only an issue of two states, but a problem within an intergovernmental organization. Consequently, the armies of six



out of the seven Member States, all except Rwanda for obvious reasons, have been deployed in the provinces to also contribute to the fighting of the rebel groups. Despite the intervention of several countries, such as Angola and Kenya, in mediation attempts, the dispute between the countries kept growing, to a point where the DRC expelled the Rwandan ambassador from its country and closed its skies to RWANDAIR. To understand the mutual accusations, it is necessary to introduce the FDCR, a Hutu rebel group fighting in Eastern Congo, as an additional actor. The DRC has accused Rwanda of both helping the M23 by assisting them with logistics, as well as supplying weapons and clothes. This claim is supported by the findings of a report elaborated by a group of UN experts and presented to the UNSC. On the other hand, Rwanda is accusing the DRC of promoting forms of hate speech against Rwandophones and of assisting the FDCR. Additionally, the M23 movement has made serious accusations against the Tshisekedi government over its use of violence against Tutsi residents, denouncing a 'genocide' and claiming that they are acting to protect the Tutsi of the region who would otherwise be unprotected. The collaboration and peace-making among these two countries must be a priority for the near future since without their reconciliation, it will be impossible to achieve peace.

### *An international conflict*

Rwanda is not the only foreign country involved in the conflict. The engagement of several foreign nations has made the government unable to respond

to the crisis by itself, considering the magnitude of the situation, it is thus receiving aid from different international actors, the major one of them being MONUSCO. MONUSCO is a peacekeeping operation that started in 2010 (officially there was a previous one from 1999), established by the UNSC with the resolution 1958. Its strategic priorities are to help the stabilisation and strengthening of state's institutions and protecting the civil population. Just recently, the mission was attacked and there have been protests in Goma (North-Kivu), because the population believes that it has failed to protect them efficiently from the various rebel groups. Other factors to consider include the presence of several different armies, the one from the DRC and six from the EAC countries. Finally, there are different militias that are acting in the name of multinational corporations, countries, religion, and self-interest. All these actors add layers of complexity to the conflict whose resolution seems as far as ever.

### *The population*

The population in the Eastern Provinces of the DRC is fed up and disillusioned; people's general responses to the situation can be grouped into three pools. Many answered a call to join the army made by Tshisekedi in November as a final attempt to take back their lands and expel the rebel groups from their villages. Another part of the population, however, has joined these organizations as a sign of protest the government which they feel has failed them once again. Finally, others are protesting



in the streets, especially in the city of Goma, where people have been manifesting against MONUSCO and have asked for all the foreign militaries to leave the region and let the problem be solved by the Congolese themselves. What is common among all the different response actions is the feeling of frustration that comes from this conflict which has been going on for more than thirty years and seems unsolvable.

### ***Final note***

In conclusion, the situation in the Eastern Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo is worsening, the levels of violence are increasing everyday so that even humanitarian help struggles to reach those in need. The social and economic circumstances are deteriorating, and no solutions seem to be possible in the foreseeable future with the relations between Rwanda and the DRC being so tense. International actors must do the best of what is in their power to facilitate conflict resolutions and peace making.

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