



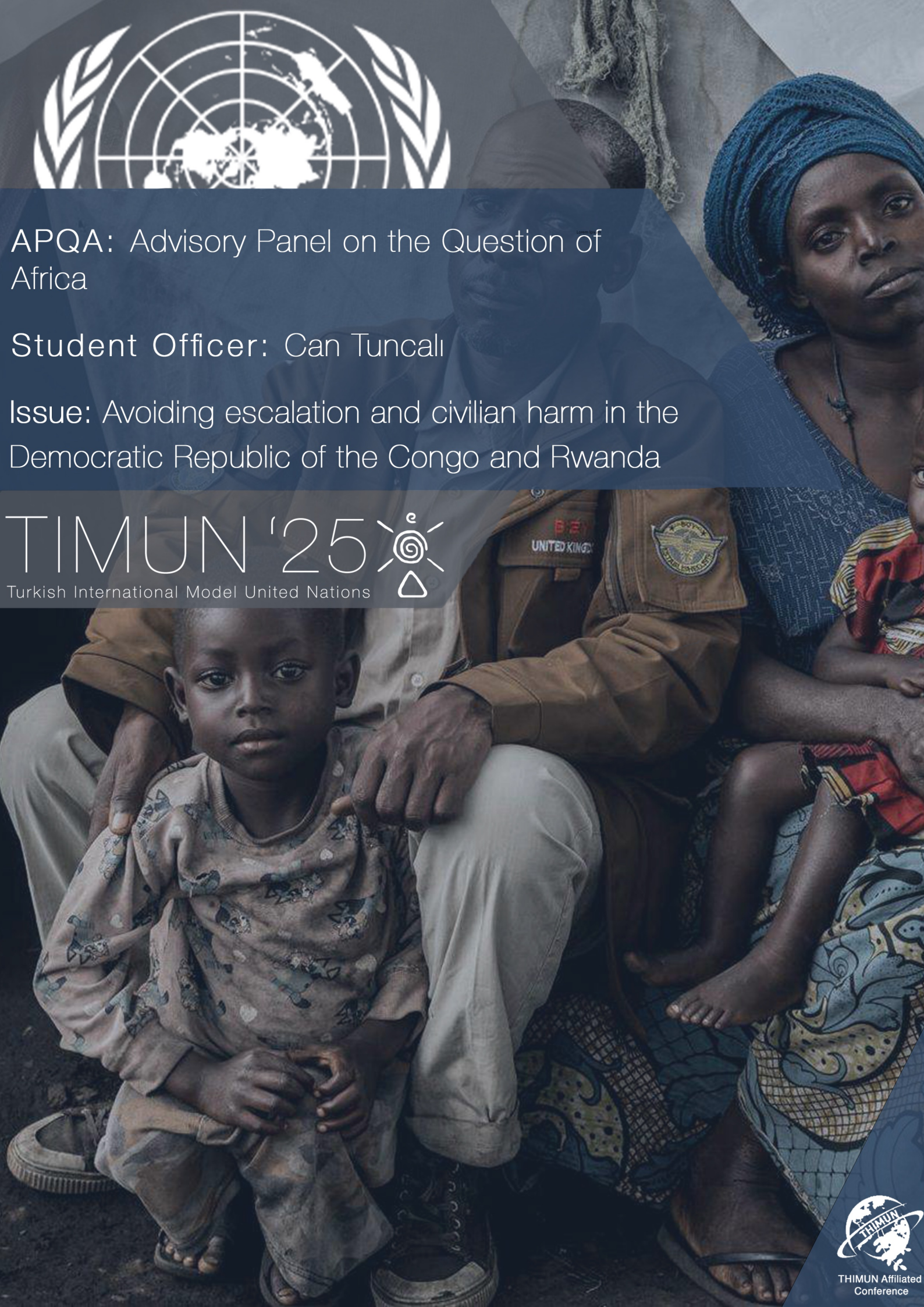
APQA: Advisory Panel on the Question of Africa

Student Officer: Can Tuncali

Issue: Avoiding escalation and civilian harm in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda

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Committee:	Advisory Panel on the Question of Middle Africa
Issue:	Avoiding Escalation and Civilian Harm in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda
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I. Introduction

The conflict in the central-eastern region of Africa has been going on for almost three decades, primarily affecting countries such as Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. Since the 1950s the two prominent ethnic groups in Rwanda, the Hutus and the Tutsis, have been in conflict.

After Rwanda gained independence in 1962, violence against the Tutsi population continued, resulting in the displaced Tutsis attempting to regain control. By the 1980s, almost 500,000 Rwandans had become refugees. The conflict continued with the peacekeeping efforts of the Security Council and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), when on 6 April 1994, the civil war escalated quickly to a genocide. Over several weeks, roughly a million people were killed in the country by mostly Hutu militias. The killings ended with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi majority group, gaining power over Rwanda.

After the genocide, many government officials and military personnel fled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, taking Hutu civilians alongside them. It is estimated that more than a million Rwandans fled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, then known as the Republic of Zaire. The new Rwandan Government and Congo went to war twice in the 1990s; the first time in 1996, and later in 1998. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda have been unable to resolve the conflict ever since, leading to three decades of military consequences and torment.

For the past four years, military action from both sides has escalated to a degree that has been affecting civilians profusely. Regional actors such as the M23, Rwandan army and Congolese army have repeatedly harmed and killed many civilians. Currently, the conflict is still ongoing, with the most harm being done to civilians all around the Congo - Rwanda border. (Council on Foreign Relations)

II. Key Vocabulary

Genocide: The United Nations defines genocide as any inflicting any form of physical or psychological harm “with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious groups.”. (United Nations)



War Crime: A war crime is an act that goes against the principles of International Humanitarian Law, and breaches the legal conditions of the Geneva Conventions. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which has been ratified by 125 Member States.(United Nations)

Militia: “a military force whose members are trained soldiers but who often have other jobs” (Cambridge Dictionary)

Refugee: “Someone who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” (UNHCR)

Mandate: “The decision that gives a body authority to carry out its functions.” (United Nations)

III. Involved Countries and Organizations

Democratic Republic of the Congo

As the host country of the conflict, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been the home to the majority of conflict sites since the resurgence of the M23 in 2022. The Congolese army, Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), has been fighting against the several militias in the region, primarily the M23 and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). Due to the recent military conflicts in 2025, 500,000 people have been displaced, in addition to the more than 6.4 million already displaced (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights). Congo is facing a multitude of problems, both military and humanitarian, and is not able to solve the problems alone, due to insufficient military capabilities and an improper aid system. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is willing to collaborate with the international community in ridding itself of the various militias currently invading it, and providing humanitarian aid to the millions in dire need of it.

Rwanda

Rwanda is one of the two major countries involved in the conflict. Dating back to the First Congo War, Rwanda has experienced on-and-off hostilities with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Currently being led by the Tutsi majority government of Paul Kagame, Rwanda has officially denied any affiliation with the M23 militia group responsible for most of the fighting in eastern Congo. On a January 26 statement, Rwanda expressed its commitment “to the pursuit of a political solution to the conflict”, and stated that the conflict in Goma was “triggered by constant violations of the ceasefire by the Congolese Armed Forces



(FARDC) in coalition with UN-sanctioned genocidal militia FDLR”. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Rwanda) While the Rwandan government denies any ties to the M23, the United Nations Security Council Committee Established Pursuant to Resolution 1533 states “Several eyewitness testimonies state that M23 receives general military supplies from the Rwandan Defense Forces (RDF) in the form of weapons and ammunition in addition to materiel support for combat operations”.

M23

The March 23 Movement group, simply known as M23, is the main acting group in the conflicts of eastern Congo. Having surfaced originally in 2012 as a Tutsi majority military group, capturing the city of Goma in a rebellion and later facing defeat in 2013, the group had been inactive for many years before resurfacing in 2021. Opposing the Hutu groups in the region, primarily the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), the M23 has been carrying out attacks for four years, resulting in the deaths of many civilians. (Britannica) The group is responsible for multiple violations of international law, including killings, sexual violence and forced displacement of civilians. The United Nations Security Council has found the Rwandan Defense Forces (RDF) to be providing military aid to the M23, while the Rwandan Government still denies any such claims.

Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)

The Democratic Forces For the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) are a Hutu majority militia operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and includes members of the 1994 Rwandan Government responsible for the Rwandan Genocide. It was formed in 2000, and is responsible for various accounts of war crimes, including the killings of civilians and sexual violence. The main goal of the FDLR appears to be regaining control in Rwanda against the Tutsi government, and it is believed that the group has genocidal ideologies, persisting since 1994. The Rwandan Government is accusing the Democratic Republic of the Congo of supporting the FDLR, while the Congolese Government is denying any form of cooperation. There is no official evidence that the Congolese Government is supporting the FDLR, in contrast to the support given to the M23 by Rwanda (United Nations Security Council).

People's Republic of China

China has major stakes in the conflict after Chinese companies acquired many of the precious cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2016. Chinese drones have been used by the Congolese Government in fighting against military groups in eastern Congo. In a February 19 statement, China expressed that they “strongly condemn the military operations by M23 and reiterate that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC should be respected and that the UN Charter and international law should be observed” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs People's Republic of China). It is in China's



best interest to keep the conflict in the region at a minimum, not only for international harmony but to protect its many mines in the region (Council on Foreign Relations).

The United States of America

The United States has played a big role in mediating the recent peace agreement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. Stating it “remains committed to driving progress toward a peace in eastern DRC that results in the restoration of DRC authority and inclusive governance that allows for the people of the region to return home and realize a more prosperous future.”, and later proceeding with the peace agreement on June 27th, the United States affirmed its dedication to solving the conflict in eastern Congo. (United States Embassy in Kinshasa) The agreement on June 27th also included a clause paving the way for United States involvement in the trading of the mineral wealth of the region, which it appears to be interested in (United States Department of State).

Uganda

A neighbouring country of both the DRC and Rwanda, Uganda has played its role in the conflict ever since the Rwandan Genocide. Fighting alongside Rwanda in both Congo Wars, Uganda stands today as a close ally of Rwanda. The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Uganda, John Mulimba, stated that “This conflict cannot be resolved by military means alone. We must intensify diplomatic and mediation efforts to achieve lasting peace.”, iterating the country’s commitment to a political solution. While the government of Uganda denies any ties with the M23 group, UN experts have found both Uganda and Rwanda to be actively supporting the M23 (United Nations).

IV. Focused Overview of the Issue

1. Historical Context & The Rwandan Genocide

The population of Rwanda consists of mainly two ethnic groups, the Hutus and Tutsis. For the first half of the 20th century, the Tutsis consisted the majority of the ruling class of the country, despite being the ethnic minority compared to the Hutus. 1950s saw the first Hutu uprisings in the country, in which many Tutsis were killed and displaced due to the imminent danger. In 1959, Tutsi domination in the country came to an end, and in 1962, Rwanda gained its independence from Belgian occupation. The conflict for power lead to a massive rise in ethnic tensions, as for the following 20 years, almost 500,000 Rwandans became refugees and had to flee to other countries for their survival. (Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations) The tensions continued, and led up to the Rwandan



civil war of 1988, which saw the formation of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), comprising mostly of Tutsi refugees who had fled to Uganda to flee the conflict.

The civil war continued for a brutal seven years until 1994. The RPF attacks on Rwanda in 1990 led the Rwandan government to label all Tutsis as accomplices of the group, and the ethnic tensions rose even further. In August 1993, with the assistance of the Organisation of African Unity, the Arusha peace agreements were signed. The October of the same year, the Security Council established the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) to oversee the implementation of the Arusha peace agreements. Over the following few months, the peace developments slowly deteriorated, as on April 6 1994 the plane carrying the presidents of Burundi and Rwanda was shot down. The following day the prime minister of the country was killed, along with 10 Belgian peacekeepers assigned to protect her were killed in violent attacks by the Rwandan military. Following the killings of its soldiers, Belgium withdrew from UNAMIR, along with many other countries in April. On April 21, UNAMIR was reduced to 270 military personnel. Over the next 100 days, between 800,000 and 1,000,000 Tutsis were brutally murdered. After an attempt by the Security Council to create a safe-zone in the south-west of the country called "Operation Turquoise", the RPF gained military control of the country on July 4, 1994; and established a new government, and the RPF became the main political party in Rwanda (Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations).

After the rise of RPF in Rwanda, 1.4 million civilians, government officials and military personnel fled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (then known as the Republic of Zaire). The majority of this 1.4 million was Hutu in ethnicity. In November of 1994, the Security Council established the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda (ICTR) in order to prosecute the individuals responsible for the mass killings that took place between 1 January and 31 December 1994. At the end of 1996, the Rwandan Government began prosecuting individuals responsible for the genocide. More than 120,000 people were arrested by the courts in Rwanda and prosecuted. In 2012, the ICTR ended the trial phase of its mandate, with 93 individuals indicted for genocide and 65 of them found guilty and convicted. (Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations)

2. The First & Second Congo Wars

In 1996 the First Congo War started due to various political reasons in the Republic of Zaire, and ended with the country's president Joseph Mobutu, who had been in power since 1967, being overthrown. The causes of the war ranged from the dissatisfaction of the Congolese people with the corrupt government of Mobutu, the residue of cold war rivalries from the 60s and the concern of the Rwandan government with the Hutu groups who had fled to Congo after the genocide in 1994.



The Rwandan and Ugandan armies joined forces and sieged Zaire from the east. When Rwanda and Uganda invaded the country, fighting against the Hutu sympathizing government of Mobutu, a rebel group in Zaire, the Alliance des Forces Democratiques pour la Liberation du Congo-Zaire (AFDL), took the opportunity to take control of the country. In May of 1997, the war ended with the rise of the AFDL, and aided by the Rwandan and Ugandan governments, Laurent-Desile Kabila assumed the role of president. (EBSCO)

The Second Congo war was the more brutal one of the two wars. Starting in 1998, mostly due to the ethnic turmoil between the Tutsis in Congo - whether Rwandan or Congolese - and the Congolese population, the war lasted for five years and saw the involvement of many other nations. Pressured with the discontent of his people with his regime and the Tutsi population in the country, President Kabila ordered the armies of Rwanda and Uganda to leave the territories of Congo. Kabila aligned himself with the Hutu militias in the region, and began publicly training them, actively raising conflicts with the governments of Rwanda and Uganda. The nations of Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Chad were allied with the Congolese government, and fought against Uganda, Rwanda and the various rebel groups they supported throughout the duration of the war.

July of 1999 saw the signing of the Lusaka Accord by the governments who had troops in Congo. Aiming to ensure peace through a cease-fire, the departure of foreign troops from the region, the help of the newly established UN Peacekeeping Forces with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUC) and an interim Congolese government in plan until the conflict ended; the Lusaka Accord failed to end the conflict in 1999 when the multiple parties of the conflict failed to oblige, and president Kabila blocked the deployment of MONUC peacekeeping forces in the country.

The war finally ended in 2003 with the DRC adopting a new constitution and establishing a transitional government as provisioned by the Lusaka Accord. The end to the conflict only came after the assassination of president Laurent-Desile Kabila in 2001, following which DRC, led by Kabila's son Joseph, signed a peace deal with Rwanda in July of 2002, and with Uganda in September of 2002. (EBSCO)

The two Congo wars, especially the second one, were some of the deadliest military conflicts recorded in history. Amassing an estimated total death toll of 5.4 million, majority of which were caused by malnutrition and health conditions according to the International Rescue Committee, the two Congo wars caused a ripple of conflict that still continues today, especially in the Kivu region of Congo. (International Rescue Committee)



3. The Rise of Militias in Eastern Congo

Due to the many conflicts it has seen, the eastern territory of DRC has been home to many militias since the second half of the 20th century. One of the most prominent actors right now is a Tutsi majority militia calling themselves the M23. They are named after the peace deal signed on March 23, 2009 between the Congolese government and the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), which saw the integration of the Tutsi majority military group into the Congolese army. The M23 first rebelled against the Congolese government in 2012 with the reason that the government had not carried out the peace agreement of March 23 properly. (BBC) The group took military control of Goma, but was later forced to cease its operations in the November of 2013, due to both turmoil within the group itself and the collective military efforts of MONUSCO (previously called MONUC), FARDC and the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB); a peacekeeping mission consisting of the governments of Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa. (Britannica)

The main opposition of the M23 was another militia, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). Including some of the Hutu population who had fled to Congo after the Rwandan Genocide, the FDLR and M23 have both caused many civilian casualties in their prolonged rivalries. Both groups are responsible for various violations of international law, ranging from sexual violence, killings of civilians and forced displacement. During the conflict in 2012, the proof that Rwanda was actively assisting the M23 deteriorated political relations between Congo and Rwanda (Council on Foreign Relations). Both groups are still active today, despite the many attempts by the FARDC and MONUSCO to put an end to militia activity in the region. The M23 reemerged in 2021 and has been active in the region ever since. Various counts of conflicts have resulted in the death and displacement of many civilians in eastern Congo.

4. Recent Developments

After the resurgence of the M23 in 2021, many different attacks saw the tensions rising between Rwanda and the DRC. The M23 clashed many times with the FDLR and FARDC until 2025, when the situation escalated quickly. Starting with the capture of Goma on January 27th, the M23 gained control of three major Congolese cities over a period of three months and rapidly continued their advance. The international community was thoroughly alarmed with the escalation in the area, and attempts to draft a peace agreement between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were quickened.

On June 27, 2025, the Rwandan and Congolese governments signed a peace agreement in Washington D.C., focusing on territorial integrity, respect of international law and the cooperation of the two nations. Following the peace agreement between the two states, a Declaration of Principles was signed between the DRC and the M23 in Doha, Qatar. The Declaration, hoping to establish a ceasefire, aimed for a peace agreement to be signed in mid-August between the DRC and M23. (UN News) Despite the signing of this ceasefire, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has stated



that attacks against civilians have continued into August 2025. (UN News) These attacks must come to an end if a peace deal is to be signed.

V. Important Events & Chronology

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
1 October 1990	Start of the Rwandan Civil War. Tutsi majority group RPF invades Rwanda, leading to heated conflict between Hutu and Tutsi populations for three years.
5 October 1993	Establishment of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) by the Security Council. The mandate of of the organization is peacekeeping, ensuring humanitarian assistance and supporting peaceful developments.
6 April 1994	Start of the Rwandan Genocide. The plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi is shot down, leading to chaos. In a period of a hundred days, over a million Rwandans are estimated to have perished, most of them Tutsi.
4 July 1994	RPF takes full control of Rwanda. Previous Hutu government flees to Congo, then known as the Republic of Zaire.
24 October 1996 - 16 May 1997	The First Congo War. The government of Zaire changes, along with its name. Rwanda and Uganda help Laurent-Désiré Kabila gain the office.
2 August 1998 - 18 July 2003	The Second Congo War. Due to disagreements between the new regime of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.
23 March 2009	Peace Agreement between the Congolese Government and Le Congres National Pour La Defense du Peuple (CNDP)
April 2012 - November 2013	The rise of M23. The group is formed and quickly takes control of most of Goma, Congo; but is later forced to retreat and surrender upon UN intervention.
November 2021 - Present	The M23 resurfaces. Many armed conflicts occur between the M23 and the FDLR and FARDC.
January - March 2025	M23 captures Goma, Bukavu and Walikale.



27 June 2025	Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo sign a peace agreement in Washington.
19 July 2025	The Democratic Republic of the Congo and the M23 sign a Declaration of Principles in Doha, Qatar.

VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

- Security Council Resolution 955, 8 November 1994 [S/RES/955 \(1994\)](#)
- Security Council Resolution 1279, 30 November 1999 [S/RES/1279 \(1999\)](#)
- Security Council Resolution 1493, 28 July 2003 [S/RES/1493 \(2003\)](#)
- Security Council Resolution 1533, 12 March 2004 [S/RES/1533 \(2004\)](#)
- Peace Agreement Between The Government (of Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Le Congres National Pour La Defense du Peuple (CNDP) [23 March 2009](#)
- Security Council Resolution 1925, 28 May 2010 [S/RES/1925 \(2010\)](#)
- Security Council Resolution 2098, 28 March 2013 [S/RES/2098 \(2013\)](#)
- Security Council Resolution 2666, 20 December 2022 [S/RES/2666 \(2022\)](#)
- Peace Agreement Between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda, [27 June 2025](#)

VII. Failed Solution Attempts

While various treaties have been signed between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, many military groups in the region are still active today, with the M23 and FDLR standing out amongst them as the most lethal. Due to a lack of military capabilities and the civilian proportion of east Congo, these militias are still active today.

The attempt to integrate the CNDP into the Congolese army failed miserably, as it led to the rise of the M23, which are still active today. If the M23 is to be reintegrated into the Congolese army, this should be done so with extreme care and precautions, so as not to repeat the aftermath of the 2009 agreement.

MONUSCO, which has renewed its mandate for yet another year at the start of 2025, still faces criticism from the people of Congo for being ineffective at its peacekeeping operations. Despite having a total of 14,000 troops, MONUSCO has not been able to prevent the various militia in the region from causing many civilian deaths. (Council on Foreign Relations)

VIII. Possible Solutions



In order to solve the issue permanently, the various militias in the Great Lakes region should either be forced to cease their operations or be integrated into the Congolese army. The Rwandan Government will not be satisfied unless the Hutu extremist groups near the border stop their activities, and this will result in the core problem of the conflict continuing. Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo should collaborate in putting an end to the various militia activities with the aid of the United Nations. If it is needed, the structure of MONUSCO should be reexamined and strengthened. Beyond this, a humanitarian aid structure must be established immediately in the Kivu region for the millions of displaced individuals. Shelter, food, medical, and psychological assistance should be provided to any civilians affected by the conflict with the collaboration of all regional actors, along with the United Nations.

The international community must see that the peace agreement signed by the Rwandan and Congolese governments is carried out as planned, and that the two member states should continue to be in close political dialogue. Experts must find a way to ensure the continued political approach to the conflict and allow for the disengagement of rebel groups without breaching the sovereignty of either Rwanda or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It must be seen through that the M23 honor the Declaration of Principles signed with the Congolese government on 19 July 2025, and a peace deal is signed.

IX. Useful Links

- [Mapping the human toll of the conflict in DR Congo | Interactive News | Al Jazeera](#)
- [DR Congo's M23 conflict: What is the fighting about and is Rwanda involved?](#)
- [Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo | Global Conflict Tracker](#)
- [March 23 Movement | Leader, Ideology, Peace Talks, Peace Agreements, Funding, Rebels, AFC, & Congo | Britannica](#)
- [Briefing Security Council on Worsening Situation in Democratic Republic of Congo, Senior Official Says Actions Endangering Civilians, UN 'Will Not Be Tolerated' | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases](#)
- [Doha agreement brings DR Congo government and M23 rebels a step closer to peace](#)



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