



## The World Must Stop Neglecting the Democratic Republic of the Congo

### A Genocide Watch Report

By Sabrina Nelson



*[Joint UN-AU Delegation Visits IDP Camp in DRC](#), by [UN Women](#) licensed under [\(CC BY-NC-ND 2.0\)](#).*

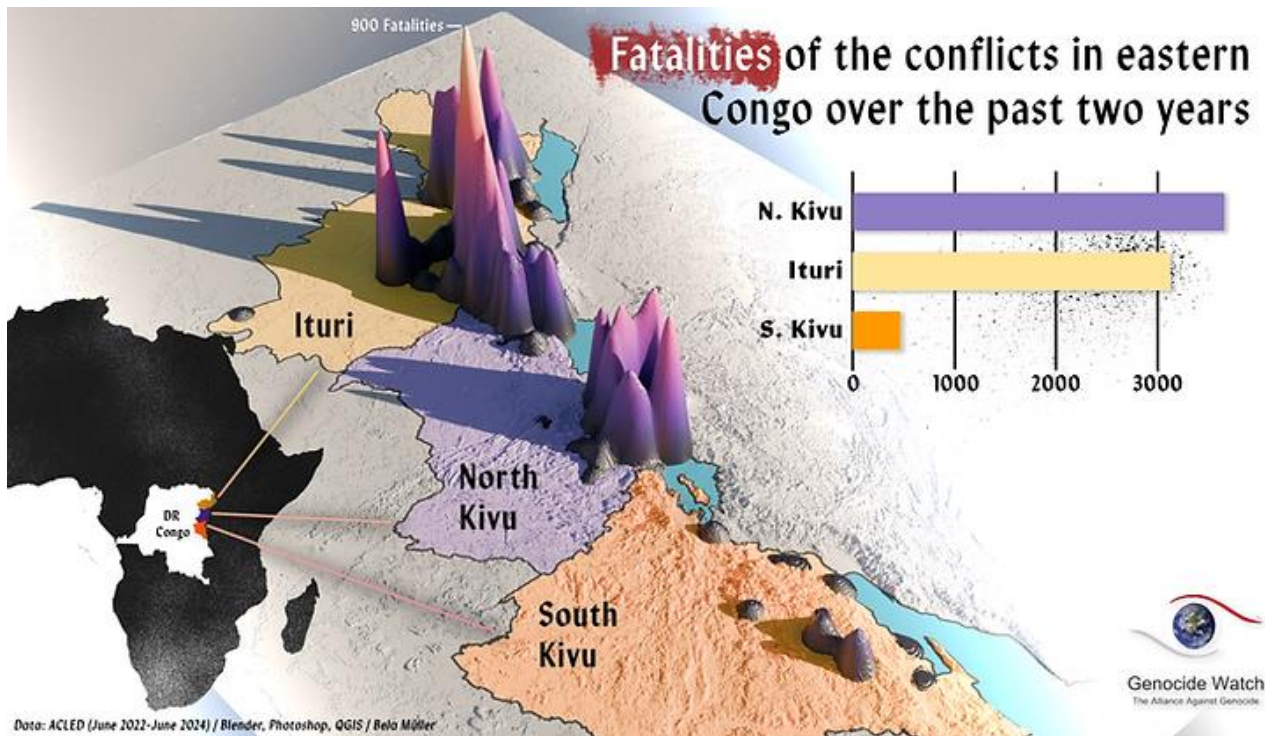
The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has faced one of the world's most serious humanitarian, insecurity, and human rights crises [for decades](#). But the UN, US, and EU have abandoned millions of civilians to starvation, war, forced displacement, and genocide.

Bintou Keita, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), [expressed his concern that](#) “the rapidly escalating M23 crisis carries the very real risk of provoking a wider regional conflict.”

There are also genocidal threats to civilians from terrorist militias like the [FDLR](#), composed of former Rwandan Hutu genocidists, the [Allied Democratic Forces \(ADF\)](#) allied with the Islamic State Central Africa Province, and ethnic [Lendu](#) and [Mai Mai](#) militias that target Congolese Tutsis such as the [Hema](#) and [Banyamulenge](#).

#### ***DRC: A country plagued by civil war and ethnic conflict***

Since 1996, when the First and Second Congo Wars broke out, the DRC has been plagued by civil war, resulting in approximately [6 million deaths](#). [Mass killing](#), extrajudicial executions, [kidnapping of children](#), mass [rape](#), other gender-based violence, torture by militias and government forces, and [ethnic discrimination](#) have become endemic in the eastern DRC.



In [1996](#), the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan military invaded Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) to pursue Hutu militiamen, who had fled there after the Genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda. This intervention set off the First Congo War. The war led to the overthrow of Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko, with Laurent-Désiré Kabila declaring himself as the new President. In 1998, a rebellion against Kabila's government, supported by Rwanda and Uganda, sparked the Second Congo War, the [deadliest](#) war since World War II. Anarchy and instability have [persisted](#) in the DRC due to the continuing presence of heavily armed ethnic militias fighting for territory and resources.

In 1999, the UN created [MONUC](#), a peacekeeping mission with the [mandate](#) to bring about peace and stability in the DRC by monitoring a ceasefire and facilitating disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants. In 2010, MONUC was renamed [MONUSCO](#), with an expanded mandate and 20,000 UN troops and police to bring peace and stability to the DRC.

[MONUSCO failed](#) to bring peace and stability due to its inadequate mandate to protect civilians and its failure to act when militias attacked. Facing growing [criticisms](#) about the mission's [ineffectiveness](#) and [dissatisfaction](#) among Congolese politicians about the UN, President Felix Tshisekedi [requested](#) that MONUSCO withdraw from the DRC by the end of 2024. Over [120 militias and armed groups](#) are actively operating in Eastern Congo. They may take over the eastern DRC when MONUSCO withdraws.



*“M23 troops Bunagana” by [Al Jazeera](#) licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).*

Since 2022, the Tutsi led rebel group M23 has committed numerous war crimes in Eastern DRC, including [unlawful killings and mass rape](#). The Rwandan army has provided direct military and financial support to M23. The UN has not sanctioned Rwanda for this support. M23 has made significant territorial gains, [seizing](#) strategic towns such as Kanyabayonga.

### ***A growing displacement crisis***

According to the Norwegian Refugee Council’s annual report, the DRC has been [ranked](#) as one of the countries with the largest displaced populations in the world for the past seven years. In [April 2024](#), the DRC had 7.3 million displaced persons. Armed attacks and clashes between armed groups have been the leading causes of this displacement. Tens of thousands [live](#) in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps around the cities of Goma, Rutshuru and Luber, where they face attacks by ethnic militias. Nobel Peace Prize laureate [Dr. Denis Mukwege](#) has criticized the West’s “negligence” toward DRC IDPs.



*“Displaced people set camp in Goma outskirts” by [MONUSCO Photos](#), licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).*

Due to ongoing attacks by armed militias, international aid organizations have had [difficulty](#) reaching civilians, leaving them to face [water and food scarcity](#). Currently, more than [25.4 million](#) people require humanitarian assistance, with the Eastern provinces being the most in need. Despite this crisis, humanitarian aid to IDPs remains drastically [underfunded](#).

### **Sexual Violence & Human Rights violations**

In 2024, there has been a significant rise in cases of sexual violence, especially against women and girls. According to [UNICEF](#), during the first quarter of 2023, more than 38,000 cases of rape were reported, a 37% increase over 2022. Women and girls in IDP camps are especially [vulnerable](#) to sexual assault [perpetrated](#) by militias and DR Congo armed forces, including rape and sexual slavery. [Personal accounts](#) have shown that many women and girls have been victims of rape when going outside the IDP camps to fetch supplies and firewood to cook.

Multiple [reports show](#) that children in the DRC have been victims of sexual violence, including rape, gang rape and sexual slavery. Congolese children’s rights have been systematically violated through the active recruitment of child soldiers by armed groups. In 2023, [1,861](#) children were reportedly recruited in Eastern Congo for combat and transport of ammunition.



*“Children Displaced by Conflict, DRC”, by [United Nations Photo](#), licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).*

Attacks by the M23 rebels have resulted in a surge of [ethnic-based discrimination](#) against the Tutsi and Banyamulenge communities. Attacks by militias against people of Tutsi background have more than doubled. While the DRC government has [condemned](#) ethnic-based violence and hate speech against Rwandaphone communities, few offences have been investigated or prosecuted. [Almost nothing has been](#) done by the Congolese government to prevent the systematic targeting of the [Banyamulenge](#), a Congolese Tutsi group - which [Genocide Watch](#) and other genocide experts consider a “[slow genocide](#)”.

***The world must react to the unfolding crisis in the DRC.***

1. The genocide unfolding in the DRC has been neglected for too long. The DRC has an ongoing genocide against Tutsi and other minority groups. It is driven by the same indigenous vs. invader ethnic mythology that drove the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The UN, EU, AU, and US must act to stop it.
2. MONUSCO must not withdraw from Eastern DRC before a new UN/AU Peacekeeping Mission is authorized, funded, and deployed. Providers of international humanitarian assistance must increase and deliver it to displaced persons and refugees to alleviate the suffering of millions of Congolese.
3. The DRC is subject to international humanitarian and human rights law. Commanders, officials, and companies complicit or responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by armed forces and militia groups must be held accountable. This includes the Rwandan officials who have provided direct military assistance to the M23 rebel militia group.
4. Protecting civilians and upholding human rights must remain the primary priority of the DRC government and of AU and UN forces. The AU and UN must assist the DRC government to protect the [Banyamulenge](#) and other minority groups from war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.