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**Democratic Republic of Congo:**

# **DRC: The need for a ceasefire**

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP601- February 2025 -

Publication date: Sunday 23 February 2025

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**The United Nations has drawn up a new death toll following the capture of Goma, the regional capital of North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), by the M23 armed group supported by Rwandan troops. Nearly 3,000 deaths have already been recorded. The Tanzania summit bringing together the countries of the region was held on Saturday 8 February. It called for a ceasefire, which appears highly hypothetical.**

Despite the announcement of a unilateral truce by the M23, the group continues to advance towards South Kivu. An intense battle took place in Nyiabibwe, 70 kilometres from the regional capital Bukavu. The DRC's armed forces are being reinforced by those of Burundi, which has deployed more than 10,000 troops.

## Formal condemnation

The violence has been documented in a major city like Goma, but these reports overlook the many war crimes committed by the M23 against the inhabitants of the villages along their path of conquest. The disapproval of the Rwandan intervention in the DRC is almost unanimous. On the other hand, divisions are emerging over the sanctions to be adopted.

China, traditionally reserved when it comes to taking a stance on conflicts in Africa, has taken a stand in favour of demanding that Rwanda and the M23 withdraw from the conquered territories. China exploits 70% of the country's mines and is concerned about its economic interests. At the same time, Rwanda remains an excellent client in the infrastructure sector.

For Europe, the unease is tangible. The EU has signed a trade agreement on rare minerals with Rwanda in the full knowledge that three quarters of this production comes from the looting of mines in the DRC. As for France, it depends on Rwandan troops to secure its oil installations, particularly those of TotalEnergies in the Cabo Delgado region of Mozambique.

## Disappointing result for the DRC

Tanzania hosted a summit bringing together the two regional entities representing Central Africa (EAC) and Southern Africa (SADC). The two bodies called for an immediate ceasefire for humanitarian operations. They have also merged their peace mediation. Another decision was to organise a ceasefire security plan in the next few days. In the absence of more precise information, interpretations differ. For Kinshasa, the plan implies the departure of M23 troops from Goma.

Finally, the summit calls for the opening of direct negotiations between the DRC and the M23, which Congolese President Tshisekedi has always refused. Given the balance of power, it would appear that he no longer has a choice, especially as religious leaders within the DRC have come out in favour of dialogue with the armed group. While the EAC and SADC have pledged their support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC, they have not called for the Rwandan troops to leave.

# Regional reconstruction

Even if the proposed cease-fire goes ahead, it is unlikely that the DRC will return to its previous situation. The Rwandan intervention has enabled the DRC to get its hands on major mining resources which, in addition to financial gains, strengthen its position as a supplier of raw materials for the energy transition in rich countries. This intervention has also opened up new opportunities for a number of countries in the DRC, which Uganda and Tanzania intend to take full advantage of. But it has also raised concerns. Burundi, which has long been opposed to Rwanda, takes a dim view of the fact that troops allied to Kigali are stationed in South Kivu close to its border. Unfortunately, the risk of the conflict spreading, as it did in the DRC at the end of the 1990s, cannot be ruled out.

While Rwanda's violation of the DRC's sovereignty must be condemned, the fact remains that the big capitalist countries continue to profit from the Congo's wealth, leaving the countries of Central Africa to fight for the crumbs.

[L'Anticapitaliste](#) 13 February 2025

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