

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8619>



Democratic Republic of Congo:

Kivu prey to warlords in DRC

- IV Online magazine - 2024 - IV595 - August 2024 -

Publication date: Friday 16 August 2024

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

By relying on armed militias against the M23 rebellion, the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is worsening the already dramatic human rights situation in the eastern part of the country. South and North Kivu are facing an offensive from the March 23 Movement (M23). This rebellion is steadily increasing its area of influence, and is currently capable of blockading the regional capital Goma, which has a population of around two million.

Rwanda's intervention

Originating from a former rebel group, the M23, since its alliance with Congolese politician Corneille Nangaa, has set itself the goal of renovating the Congolese state. Above all, it acts as Rwanda's Trojan horse. Although for several months Kigali denied any support for this militia, President Paul Kagamé is now taking responsibility for this military intervention in the DRC. It would be difficult to do otherwise, given the number of Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) soldiers present on Congolese territory. They are estimated to number more than three thousand, with heavy and sophisticated weaponry. Officially, the aim of this intervention is to eliminate the Front Démocratique de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR). This militia, originally made up of genocidal Hutus who had taken refuge in the DRC under the French military operation Turquoise, was perceived as a threat by Rwanda. In reality, the invasion is a good way for the Rwandan elite to plunder the region's mineral wealth.

Governmental incompetence

The DRC's Tshisekedi government is unable to defend the integrity of the territory because of the serious shortcomings of the DRC's armed forces (FARDC). This structure is a sort of millefeuille made up of former militiamen who, as conflicts and peace agreements have progressed, have been integrated into the army without receiving any training and very little equipment. This is due to mismanagement and a high level of corruption within the military hierarchy. The sums allocated for armaments are misappropriated; petrol and sometimes equipment are resold; pay, when received, is miserly. As a result, the FARDC does not worry much about the M23.

The Congolese authorities have taken several measures. Externally, they have unsuccessfully urged the UN force, MONUSCO, to play an offensive role against the M23. They called on South African forces, which deployed 2,900 men with little result. Faced with such a situation, Tshisekedi threatened FARDC soldiers who fled the fighting with the death penalty. He has also developed a nationalist rhetoric, with the risk of stigmatising the Banyamulenge community, Congolese Tutsis suspected of favouring Rwanda. The government enjoys a near-consensus against the Rwandan aggression, which is obviously very convenient for absolving itself of its own responsibilities.

The reign of militias

The DRC authorities rely on some of the many militias operating in the east of the country, primarily the FLDR. These armed groups all present themselves as *wazalendo*, or 'patriots' in Kiswahili. This legitimises their existence and allows them to enjoy impunity for the many human rights violations they commit. The government has tried to

Kivu prey to warlords in DRC

formalise these alliances by creating the Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie (VDP) (Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland), ensuring that its members can later join a hypothetical armed reserve for the defence of the DRC.

On the ground, the difference between VDP and *wazalendo* is non-existent. While the latter have succeeded in halting the advance of the M23, their use has been denounced by human rights activists. Most of their leaders have been charged with war crimes or crimes against humanity. There are profound differences, and even competition, over control of territories and access to resources. Most often they boil down to a racket on the people, who have no choice but to flee in order to survive, piling up in refugee camps. There are more than a hundred such camps around Goma.

2 August 2024

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.