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135,000 people displaced and millions of people at risk as clashes intensify in North Kivu, DR Congo

Already critical after a year of heightened insecurity and violence against civilians, the humanitarian situation in North Kivu is now at a tipping point, putting millions of civilians at risk.

In the latest episode in a resurgence of fighting between the Congolese army and the M23 armed group that has forced thousands of people from their homes, 135,000 people have fled Sake towards the provincial capital Goma since 7 February. Some were already displaced in Zaina camp, on the outskirts of Sake, which was hit by a bomb explosion on 12 February.

“Attacks on IDP camps are not an isolated case, their frequency is such that people are constantly on the move” says Michel Paradis, DRC’s Country Director in DR Congo. “It is unthinkable that attacks are perpetrated on IDP camps, where people come in search of safety,” he adds.

The indiscriminate bombing and subsequent population displacement are putting additional pressure on the humanitarian infrastructure, which is already bursting at the seams due to the extraordinary scale of the needs and lack of funding – the province of North Kivu is already home to 2.5 million forcibly displaced people.

Not only does the violence upsurge the needs, but it also impedes humanitarian access to some of the people who need it the most. M23 has blocked the two main roads to Goma, leaving limited options for safe passage and leading to a surge in food prices.

Yet, displaced families are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including protection, food, water and sanitation.

“Once again, civilians are bearing the brunt of the conflict. We are witnessing blatant violations of international humanitarian law. Under no circumstances, whatever the conflict, should civilians be targeted,” says Michel Paradis.

DRC is extremely concerned about the current situation, and in the strongest terms calls on all involved parties to uphold respect for international human rights and humanitarian law, and to protect civilians and humanitarian workers from violence in Masisi and eastern DR Congo more broadly.

DRC’s response

DRC mobilised additional capacity and its surge mechanisms in order to respond to the arrival of displaced populations into the IDP site of Lushagala, focusing on life-saving protection services, as well as education. More specifically, DRC will provide psycho-social support and individual protection assistance to 340 people, and refer them to other services when necessary. In order not to disrupt education further, DRC will also rely on its robust emergency education programming and use radio for remote learning, while also supporting local schools, which will benefit 3,000 pupils.

DRC will monitor the fast-evolving crisis in order to scale up its response where and where needed, based on the needs of affected people and the potential gaps in the availability of services. We urgently appeal to international donors to intensify their efforts and provide immediate support to meet the critical emergency needs.

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Further information:

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