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JOINT STATEMENT: EU MUST ACT TO SAVE LIVES AND END IMPUNITY IN EASTERN DRC

The fall of Uvira, the second largest city in South Kivu province, to the Rwandan-backed armed group March 23 Movement (M23) on 10 December must catalyse the European Union (EU) and its member states' response to the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Our organizations – Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) – call on the EU and its member states to redouble action on the conflict in eastern DRC, putting human rights and accountability for violations at the centre of their response.

Continued violence highlights the escalating and regional nature of the conflict, as Burundi and Rwanda security forces have been actively engaged in the conflict in South Kivu. Moreover, the use of attack drones and heavy artillery have resulted in civilian deaths, injuries and mass displacement, including tens of thousands of Congolese who crossed into Burundi as conflict intensified near Uvira. Hospitals and health centres are overwhelmed with patients, some of whom require specialist surgeons, and are in desperate need of basic medical supplies, anaesthesia and critical materials. While most Congolese army soldiers fled Uvira prior to the arrival of M23, some Wazalendo (a loose coalition of armed groups, some of whom are supported by the Congolese army) armed fighters remain in or near Uvira, which has led to clashes with M23. Meanwhile, in North Kivu, fighting between M23 and Wazalendo groups continues in several areas.

Since early 2025, there has been a major escalation in the conflict in eastern DRC between the Rwanda-backed M23 and the Congolese army (FARDC) backed by allied Wazalendo armed groups and Burundian forces. On 27 January 2025, M23 captured Goma, North Kivu's provincial capital, followed by Bukavu, South Kivu's provincial capital, on 16 February. Even before the fall of Uvira, violence had continued to increase, causing the displacement of 5.7 million people, 90% of whom are in the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri, where camps for displaced persons are overcrowded, lacking inadequate health infrastructure and capacity to meet growing humanitarian needs.

Eastern DRC is increasingly militarized with no signs of slowing as M23 has taken control of vast swathes of territory in the region and the Wazalendo have received ammunition and weapons supplied by the FARDC. Our organizations have [documented](#) how M23 fighters have summarily killed Congolese civilians, gang-raped women, attacked hospitals, abducted patients and detained, tortured and/or forcibly disappeared civil society members, human rights defenders and journalists. Amid massive prison escapes in the eastern part of the country, [mass rapes and deaths of hundreds of women](#) occurred at Goma prison in February 2025. [Serious violations](#) have continued even during and following US- and Qatar-led efforts to secure a peace deal or ceasefire

in the region. In its [initial findings](#) delivered on 5 September 2025, the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission on the DRC reported extrajudicial executions, torture, gang rape and other forms of sexual violence, abductions, forced displacement and recruitment of children, perpetrated by the M23 as well as by the FARDC and the Wazalendo, which may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Despite initial efforts to respond to the M23 capture of Goma and Bukavu and severe violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed in the region, the EU and its member states have remained largely mute since the preliminary agreement signed on 27 June between DRC and Rwanda. In the weeks that followed the signing of the preliminary agreement, Rwanda-backed M23 forces carried out [mass killings](#) across Binza *groupement*, Rutshuru territory, throughout July and early August. These mass killings and continuing [human rights](#) and humanitarian law violations in the second half of the year call into question the efficacy of mediation efforts without clear enforcement mechanisms.

Human rights abuses continued unabated as EU and African Union (AU) officials gathered for multiple meetings throughout the year, discussing DRC in a [ministerial meeting](#) (21 May), a [meeting](#) between the EU Political and Security Committee and the AU Peace and Security Council (8-9 October) and the [EU-AU summit](#) (24-25 November). Following these meetings, European and African officials jointly “reiterate[d their] unwavering support for a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in DRC” and other conflicts worldwide.

The signature of a peace deal between the presidents of DRC and Rwanda in Washington, DC on 3 December took place as the violence continued in eastern DRC. The 5 December EU [statement](#) rightly expressed regret for violence, human rights violations and the persistent humanitarian crisis in eastern DRC, yet lacked any concrete commitments on EU and member state action and failed to highlight the importance of justice and accountability.

Our organizations call on the EU and its member states to act with an urgency that matches the seriousness of this ongoing conflict, with a robust, strategic and sustained approach in line with the EU's stated commitments on human rights:

- Place the DRC on the agenda of the forthcoming meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 15 December, in response to the ongoing crisis, committing to take concrete action to protect civilians from atrocities and ensuring accountability for ongoing violations in eastern DRC.
- Develop a clear, unified EU and member state strategy in response to the DRC crisis, reassessing the implementation of the renewed EU strategy for the Great Lakes region in view of the continued conflict and redoubling efforts on human rights and accountability.
- Urgently engage with both DRC and Rwandan authorities up to highest level, strongly urging all warring parties in the east of the country – including M23 fighters, the Rwandan and Congolese armies, and their allies – to prioritize the protection of civilians. The EU and its member states should make clear that they are ready to use all tools at their disposal to hold government officials accountable for human rights violations committed in this context and put this commitment into action.
- Strongly and publicly condemn the arbitrary executions, rape, forced labour, forced recruitment and other war crimes and crimes against humanity as reported by the Office

of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as sexual violence against women and girls and the recruitment of child soldiers by armed groups.

- Spearhead action on justice and accountability for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in eastern DRC, including pressing parties to the conflict to allow access to the Commission of Inquiry on the DRC and fully supporting UN mechanisms, especially in the current UN liquidity crisis, and ensuring that accountability remains at the heart of any peace negotiations.
- Review the EU's Memorandum of Understanding with Rwanda within the context of the Global Gateway, ensuring the partnership is not contributing to human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law, including in DRC. The EU should also ensure that Rwanda and M23 do not financially benefit from minerals illegally obtained in DRC that fuel their military operations, sustaining the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crisis.
- Continue to provide humanitarian assistance for civilians in M23-controlled areas of Congo as well as to refugees in Burundi. Press M23 to allow international experts to access the airports in Bukavu and Goma to repair damaged infrastructure and allow desperately needed humanitarian aid into eastern DRC, including urgent support to medical establishments in Uvira and surrounding communities. In view of the current cuts in US foreign aid, increase the humanitarian response in the DRC and in the region for refugees and asylum seekers, matched by robust public and private EU diplomacy in response to the humanitarian and human rights crisis.
- Take action for Congolese human rights defenders in eastern DRC and those displaced by the conflict, providing rapid protection (including visas on humanitarian grounds and relocation), financial support and pro-active diplomacy on their behalf toward regional governments and armed groups.
- In parallel, conduct genuine, broad-based consultation with Congolese human rights defenders and civil society organizations, ensuring the inclusion of their views and concerns and the full participation of women in any peace process or other decision-making that affects them.