

Unjustified silence in the face of this new war in eastern DR Congo

Since Jan 23, 2025, the rebel March 23 Movement (M23), with the support of Rwanda, has launched an offensive in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, further exacerbating the region's ongoing conflict. This escalation has resulted in loss of life, displacement, and destruction. The region's vast reserves of rare metals—such as coltan, uranium, and tantalum, which are essential for the global technology and automotive industries—remain a key strategic interest. The competition for these crucial resources, fuelled by global demand, has an important role in shaping the dynamics of the conflict, further entrenching instability and suffering in the region. At least 40% of the world's supply of tantalum is estimated to come from this part of the world.¹ There are reports that some of the main mining areas are now under the control of the M23.^{2,3}

According to WHO, the ongoing conflict has claimed many victims, including nearly 3000 deaths⁴ and many injuries in the city of Goma alone, and has led to the collapse of the local health system, aggravating the humanitarian crisis with the threat of epidemics, insufficient access to drinking water, and unsanitary conditions.⁵ As of Feb 5, 2025, the DRC Red Cross reports having buried more than 2000 bodies, while 900 remain waiting in already saturated morgues.⁶ As is often the case during conflicts, an increase in rapes and other forms of gender-based violence perpetrated by armed men during the clashes has occurred in the city of Goma, mainly against women and children.⁷

Further south, the city of Bukavu, with a population of over 500 000 people, faces similar dangers. Like other health facilities in this war-torn region, the staff of Panzi hospital, which is renowned for treating victims of gender-based violence and is

headed by Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege, are threatened with verbal and physical assaults by the warring parties, thus limiting access to health services. This 350-bed hospital is one of the main health institutions in the city, but also serves mainly as a reference centre for the province of South Kivu for the holistic treatment of victims of sexual violence, as well as maternal care and family planning.⁸ In addition, reports from Congolese health professionals reveal alarming incidents of rape and deliberate killings by combatants, contributing to growing panic and putting further pressure on health services.^{5,8}

Despite the efforts of non-governmental organisations, such as Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Committee of the Red Cross, to support health facilities, the human toll of this resource-driven conflict continues to be overlooked by the international community. We, professionals with varied backgrounds ranging from the medical sciences to law, urge all members of the international medical community to push their respective governments to demand an immediate end to the war and the restoration of international law, whether through the UN or the African Union.

Inaction implies resignation to the idea that the survival of the fittest governs the world's fate. We must act now to defend the fundamental values of justice, dignity, and the worth of every human life. If we do not, we and future generations will have to reckon with the consequences of our indifference.

We declare no competing interests.

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