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Position paper of Dr. Denis Mukwege
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For the past three decades, the Congolese people have endured chronic armed conflicts and repeated wars of aggression, humanitarian disasters, and systemic violations of international law and human rights. The turmoil in DRC traces back to 1994, when the international community mishandled the fallout of the Rwandan genocide, allowing its consequences to spill over into eastern Congo. The political economy of the violence is largely driven by the illegal exploitation and smuggling of Congolese natural and mineral resources by neighboring countries, notably Rwanda and Uganda, which have either operated on Congolese territory themselves or supported proxies to further their destabilization and pillaging objectives.

Despite past political and peace agreements, armed conflict has never abated, with more than 100 domestic and foreign armed groups operating with total impunity fueling the repetition of mass atrocities. Meanwhile, DRC authorities have failed to reform its security sector system and deploy security and justice providers in large parts of its territory. The human cost of this forgotten war is enormous: violence and instability have claimed over 6 million Congolese lives. It is the deadliest conflict since World War II and remains one of the most devastating humanitarian crises, while also driving one of the largest ongoing displacement crises.

The resurgence of the M23 in November 2021 and yet another war of aggression by the Rwanda Defense Forces (RDF) has largely contributed to the deterioration of security and human rights, further worsening an already dire humanitarian crisis. Over 25 million Congolese people are facing severe hunger, and millions of displaced persons are surviving in inhumane conditions, majorities of which are women and children. Conflict-related sexual violence is also on the rise in the DRC: in 2023, the United Nations (UN) reported more than 123,000 cases of sexual and gender-based violence. That is 1 case every 4 minutes.

Despite the severity of the ongoing multifaceted crisis and the blatant violation of DRC's sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Kigali regime, an open defiance of the UN Charter, it remains one of the world's most neglected crises.



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According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, this neglect stems from a lack of international political will, insufficient aid, and limited media attention. Moreover, despite strong evidence from the UN Group of Experts, as well as state and non-state actors, confirming Rwanda's direct involvement in DRC, with an estimated 4,000 to 7,000 troops deployed in support of M23, the diplomatic community's response has been either timid or nonexistent. This inaction sends a message to the forces of aggression and occupation that they can continue their offensive and abuses with impunity.

Diplomatic initiatives aimed at de-escalating tensions and finding a political resolution to the conflict, namely the Nairobi and Luanda processes, under the auspices of the East African Community and the African Union, have so far yielded no concrete results. This failure is due to a lack of international political will and continued bad faith of the Rwandan Defense Forces (RDF) and its allies, including the M23 armed group and its military branch the *Alliance Fleuve Congo* (AFC), which have actively undermined regional peace efforts. This indifference and inaction of the world community, exposing its selective outrage and double standards, have enabled a major escalation and rapid territorial expansion of occupying forces since January 2025. Today, the Rwandan Defense Forces (RDF) and their allies control vast areas of North and South Kivu, including Goma and Bukavu, effectively ruling over approximately 10 million Congolese people, nearly the population of Belgium, who now live in fear under the aggressor's authority. Moreover, this war of occupation and aggression has increasingly taken on the characteristics of annexation, with the establishment of a parallel administration resembling that of a state. The M23/AFC coalition has appointed governors, police, tax authorities, and customary chiefs, consolidating its grip on the region. This not only poses an existential threat to the DRC and risk of balkanization but also heightens the danger of escalation across the African Great Lakes sub-region, threatening international peace and security.

Despite repeated condemnations from the international community, including the European Union (EU), the International Contact Group and G7, as well as calls for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and withdrawal of RDF troops without preconditions, the Kigali regime and its allies have consistently ignored these demands. This comes despite the adoption of UN Security Resolution 2773 on February 21, 2025, which, unfortunately, lacked strong enforcement through sanctions. In the past month, increased pressure from various states, including the US, UK, Canada, Belgium, and Germany, has had little effect, as Rwanda continues to show contempt for international law and diplomacy.



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This is particularly concerning, as Rwanda remains largely dependent on international aid, making it vulnerable to external pressure.

The time has come for decisive diplomatic action and multilateral coordination to silence the guns and put an end to the ongoing attack on DRC's sovereignty and the rules-based international order, which is eroding the credibility of the collective security system. Urgent and decisive measures must be taken to halt Rwanda's systemic violations of international law and human rights, and to compel the criminal regime in Kigali to withdraw its troops from the Congolese territory. Therefore, calls for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of occupying forces must now be accompanied by a firm deadline and robust, coordinated sanctions in the event of non-compliance. It is becoming increasingly urgent for the international community to use all available leverage to bring an end this security and humanitarian disaster.

In a positive development, the EU Parliament adopted a resolution in February urging European institutions and Member States to suspend direct budgetary aid, as well as military and security assistance to Rwanda. The resolution also calls for freezing all aid and to immediately suspending the EU-Rwanda Memorandum of Understanding on strategic minerals under the Global Gateway strategy. Additionally, the EU rightly condemned Rwanda's support for M23 and its military presence on Congolese territory, in clear violation of international law, and committed to using all available tools to address the issue. It is high time for the EU to move beyond double standards and truly differentiate itself in this crisis by upholding its fundamental values, namely the promotion of peace, the rule of law, and human rights, while respecting the principle of coherence in its foreign relations, particularly in Africa.

The EU Foreign Affairs Council and Member States, including the Netherlands, must adopt and implement vigorous sanctions without delay. They should also support the revitalization and full implementation of the commitments made under the 2013 Addis Ababa Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region, as it represents the most comprehensive peace agreement aimed at addressing the root causes of violence and instability in the Great Lakes region.

I thank the efforts of the Members of the Committee on Foreign Trade and Development of the House of Representatives of the Netherlands will make to restore peace and stability in the DRC.

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