

DRC Displaced persons hiding in North Kivu forests

NAIROBI, 27 January 2010 (IRIN) - Insecurity in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has displaced thousands of civilians, forcing many to hide in forests or seek shelter with other families, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

"While those who have reached safety in camps have access to food and non-food assistance, as well as medical help, the majority that are still in the forest or [living] with host families are not enjoying similar support," David Nthengwe, UNHCR spokesman in the provincial capital Goma, said.

Since December, 15,508 newly displaced people have been registered at dozens of camps, bringing the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the 47 UNHCR-run sites in the region to 116,000.

The agency, Nthengwe said, was particularly worried that more people would be displaced by ongoing government offensives and assaults by armed militia terrorising the civilian population.

"Our concern remains the safety of civilians fleeing these offensives," he told IRIN on 27 January. "We are prevented from reaching all the affected communities as a result of insecurity and impassable terrain."

The displacement follows several offensives launched by the DRC government in 2009 to eliminate a 6,000-strong Rwandan-led Hutu militia that controls large swathes of land, mainly in the mineral-rich Kivu provinces. The illegal mineral trade helps to finance the war.

The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and the national army, the FARDC (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo), are blamed for human-rights abuses in North and South Kivu, including widespread rape and sexual violence.

At least 200,000 cases of sexual violence have been recorded in eastern DRC since 1996, according to the UN. Across the country, an estimated 2.1 million people have been displaced by conflict, including about 538,880 in South Kivu Province and 1,130,000 in North Kivu.

Meanwhile, the UN has called for support to civilians displaced by armed violence in northwestern DRC, saying those in Sud-Ubangi district were in dire humanitarian need.

The district is in Equateur Province, where sporadic inter-communal violence has occurred over decades. In October, clashes broke out over fishing rights in Dongou, gradually turning into widespread armed violence.

"After weeks of insecurity, the area is now sufficiently safe for humanitarian operations," Abdou Dieng, acting Humanitarian Coordinator in the DRC, said.

Equateur province hosts at least 60,000 people displaced by the violence. Another 109,000 people sought refuge in neighbouring Republic of the Congo and 18,000 in Central African Republic, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

A major concern, however, is that the waterway, which marks the border between the two Congos and is the only available route to deliver aid to many of the refugees, is [*running low due to poor rains.*](#)



IRIN) [Refugees/IDPs](#)

Photo: [Aubrey Graham/IRIN](#) 

Children at one of North Kivu's internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps (file photo): UNHCR is worried that more people may be displaced by ongoing government offensives and assaults by armed militia