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As Masisi, a lush territory in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), finds itself surrounded by military elements and mounting conflict, humanitarian agencies grow increasingly concerned about its civilian population.

Masisi is a transit corridor for everything from minerals to arms, and it is a former stronghold of CNDP. Currently under government control, it is also home to the Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS), an armed group now allied with FARDC, the national army.

Northwest of Masisi town is the unpredictable Raïa Mutomboki, an anti-Rwandophone Maï-Maï, or rebel, group now allied with M23. To the northeast is Maï-Maï Cheka, which is known for beheadings and is said to be engaging with M23. To the south, in Minova, is FARDC, which is also known for rights abuses.

"It's a terrible road, huge insecurity, tons of militia, hundreds of existing camps - already it's a catastrophe," said Tariq Riebl, humanitarian coordinator for the NGO Oxfam. Five camps for internally displaced people northeast of Masisi's Mushaki Village have emptied out so far - at least one due to pillaging by Raia Mutomboki - leaving 50,000 people pre-emptively on the move. Many of those who fled Masisi have arrived at Mugunga I and Lac Vert camps just outside Goma. "Insecurity is hampering aid efforts, with ongoing fighting and attacks preventing aid workers from reaching some areas for prolonged periods of time," said a 26 November Oxfam statement.

On 14 November, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) issued a public statement calling for MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping force in DRC, and the army to urgently intervene to stop "Congo's forgotten conflict" in Masisi. The organization documented at least 18 tit-for-tat killings and the burning of displacement camps and villages, some despite "the presence of a MONUSCO base less than a kilometer away".

In putting down the M23 rebellion in Rutshuru - another North Kivu territory - that has been gathering pace since May, the government army left areas of Masisi District unprotected and rebel groups moved in. "This has caused an unjustifiable lack of protection for the population," said a JRS staff member from Masisi.

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