



AFRICA SANS HAINE

## **DRC-RWANDA-GREAT LAKES SITUATION REPORT**

### **INACH Global Pulse Brief Series**

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## **1. Context**

The situation in the Great Lakes region is marked by the war raging in eastern DRC. This war pits the DRC Armed Forces (FARDC) against the rebels of the M23-AFC coalition, supported by neighboring Rwanda. The FARDC are also supported by a youth militia called the "Wazalendo." Since the beginning of the year, this war has already left more than 3,000 dead and thousands displaced in the provinces of North and South Kivu in eastern DRC.

Supported by nearly 4,000 Rwandan soldiers, the rebels have managed to seize several Congolese towns and territories. The biggest turning point was their capture of the major cities of Goma and Bukavu. It was a bloodbath. Many bodies were buried in mass graves. The rebels' stated objective is to reach the capital, Kinshasa, to, they say, "drive President Félix Tshisekedi from power."

## **2. Human Rights Violations and Looting of Congolese Minerals**

In cities and territories under rebel occupation, Congo's mineral resources are being systematically looted by Rwandan forces. Several reports from the UN and international NGOs attested to this. Among the looted minerals are coltan, cassiterite, tungsten, and gold. The NGO Global Witness accuses the Luxembourg-based company Traxys of purchasing coltan stolen from Congo from Rwanda.

The other side of this war is massive human rights violations by all parties to the conflict. The UN denounces "summary executions, sexual violence, forced recruitment of children," etc.

According to several accounts, confirmed by our correspondents on the ground, civilians in the territories occupied by Rwanda are being terrorized. Others are being whipped by rebel soldiers as if they were in the days of slavery. The torture is called "Ntumbu yulu" (belly up). It involves immobilizing the alleged perpetrator on the ground while being whipped across their stomach.

Pro-democracy activists are paying a heavy price. Some have been murdered by the rebels. This is the case of the young, committed singer Delcat Idengo, killed

on February 13, 2025, while filming his latest single, "Bunduki za Kwetu" (Our Weapon). Another pro-democracy activist who was assassinated was Pierre Byamungu. He was killed on February 12, 2025, by the M23-RDF in Kalehe territory, still in the rebel-controlled part of eastern DRC. Indeed, a climate of terror reigns in the region controlled by pro-Rwandan rebels.

In the Congolese government-controlled region, the situation is far from rosy. While freedom of expression is tolerated, dissident voices are often stigmatized and considered supporters of the rebels and Rwanda. Access restrictions to certain social media platforms such as Twitter (X) and TikTok have been observed. These two platforms are considered instruments of Rwandan propaganda against the Kinshasa regime.

Young people from political parties, most of them unemployed, are manipulated and exploited by figures in both the government and the opposition. Political debates on radio or television sometimes end in brawls.

### **3. Restrictions on Freedom of Information**

The government is trying to control the narrative about the war, to the detriment of diverse information. Since last year (2024), the Higher Council for Audiovisual and Communication (CSAC), a state media regulatory body, has banned media outlets from reporting on the M23 rebels and Rwanda. It has ordered journalists to only publish information shared by the government and the military hierarchy. This situation is embarrassing for the media and NGOs, especially since the sources of information for both the rebels and the government are often not credible. As a result, information verified and published by independent sources is often frowned upon when it is unfavorable to the government or the rebels.

This situation places organizations like ours between a rock and a hard place. We are caught between two fires: the rebels on one side, and the government on the other.

### **4. Violence Against Western Embassies**

Almost all international NGOs are considered instruments of Western imperialism. Even local media outlets and Congolese NGOs are labeled servants of the West when they adopt a stance similar to that of the international community, or when they partner with Western NGOs deemed hostile to the government.

This opinion is deeply rooted among the population, especially among young people. Some Western countries such as France, Belgium, and the United States are considered providers of funds, weapons, and ammunition to the rebels and to Rwanda. So much so that when the rebels captured the major city of Goma, angry protesters violently attacked Western embassies and diplomatic missions in the capital, Kinshasa. This was the case with the French embassy, part of which was set on fire. This situation has led embassies such as those of the United States and France to suspend visa issuance to Congolese citizens, except in exceptional cases. Currently, various mediation efforts are underway to end the war, but without significant results so far.

## **5. War, Hate Speech, and Disinformation**

The Democratic Republic of Congo has always been a country where ethnic hatred is very strong. We have consistently denounced this scourge in our various reports. Congolese people are much more attached to their ethnic groups and the political leaders of their region of origin than to the nation. Speeches advocating secession and the Balkanization of the country are omnipresent on social media. And the war only amplifies ethnic divisions, hate speech, and disinformation, particularly on social media. Due to the war, this hatred primarily targets Rwandan-speaking Tutsi populations living in the east of the country, but also Swahili-speaking and Luba people from Kasai, the ethnic group of the current president.

For example, Rwandans are referred to as "rats" (rats-ndais). Some Congolese are called a "race of vipers and a cursed tribe"; others, such as former outgoing President Joseph Kabila and opposition leader Moïse Katumbi, are accused of being "non-Congolese" or people of dubious nationality who have come to sow disorder in the Congo.

Most hate speech is the work of political leaders and so-called journalists and influencers who spread it through platforms such as X, TikTok, YouTube, etc. Political debates are often incredibly virulent, marked by insults, defamation, and sometimes brawls. Each political camp has a digital army using fake accounts and names on social media, which function as veritable machines for spreading hateful messages and disinformation about war, diplomacy, and so on. The heads of state of Rwanda and Congo do not hesitate to publicly denigrate each other. Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi called his Rwandan counterpart a "fleecer" and "cowardly"; in return, the Rwandan president called Félix Tshisekedi a former "pizza delivery man." This rhetoric reflects the high level of tensions between the two countries.

The visceral hatred and rivalries between Rwandan and Congolese officials are such that when they meet at international meetings abroad, they never shake hands or appear together in the official family photo.

During this war, disinformation is used to demoralize opposing troops at the front. For example, when pro-Rwandan social media falsely announces that the rebels are already 10 km from a town, this pushes loyalist soldiers to retreat and give ground, even though the information is false. This is how the rebels took some towns without a fight, helped by their disinformation network.

## **6. What is Africa Sans Haine doing about this?**

Our organization was created specifically to combat hate speech and disinformation. We publish articles on our website and posts on our social media to condemn acts of violence, hateful images, and hateful remarks. On our Facebook page, we denounce hate speech and disinformation using screenshots as evidence, while naming the perpetrators. This often earns us threats, but we do it. Our organization also routinely lists and documents cases of hate speech and disinformation, online or offline, at the national or regional level. At the end of the year, we publish an annual report on the documented cases.

[Here](#), for example, is the report we published after the December 2023 general elections.

## **7. What must be done to counter hate speech and disinformation?**

To counter hate, violent extremism, and disinformation, it is important to:

- Raise awareness (conferences, workshops, public forums, carnivals, radio, television, etc.);
- Speak out on the media and social networks;
- Encourage positive discourse, promote peace and social cohesion;
- Involve the authorities in finding solutions;
- Call on neighboring countries to stop destabilizing the Congo by supporting and arming the rebels; - Involve young people in the fight against violence, hate speech, and disinformation.

In the DRC, young people are the most easily manipulated segment of the population on social media, in political parties, associations, militias, and rebel movements.

## **8. Are there any cyber hate trends or disinformation narratives that stand out?**

In recent days, significant hate speech has primarily targeted former President Joseph Kabila, who chose to join the Rwandan-backed M23-AFC rebels. Joseph Kabila traveled to Goma, a large city in the east of the country ruled by the M23-AFC rebels.

The government in Kinshasa immediately responded by launching legal proceedings against him, searching his residences, and banning his political party, the People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD).

As a result of this situation, we are seeing a lot of hate messages on social media between supporters of the former head of state and those of the current president. These messages are ethnically motivated.

Another notable development on social media concerns priests of the Congolese Catholic and Protestant Churches. The regime accuses them of serving the rebels and Rwanda. Some priests have been called "enemies of the Republic" in their cassocks. Here too, there has been a lot of hate messages online between defenders and detractors of priests.

### **9. What is happening in your country/region recently that influences hate speech trends?**

Among the reasons that have exacerbated hate speech and disinformation in recent months, there are three things:

- The ravages of war;
- The fact that former President Joseph Kabila has allied himself with the M23-AFC rebels;
- And the idea of changing the Constitution launched by the current President, Félix Tshisekedi.

Since 2024, President Tshisekedi has launched a campaign for constitutional change, believing that some of the institutional blockages he faces are due to constitutional provisions that, according to him, are no longer adapted to the evolving situation in the country. His detractors quickly accused him of seeking to amend the Constitution to secure a third term. They called for a general mobilization to block any change to the Constitution.

This mobilization has been accompanied by violent rhetoric, calls for the secession of certain provinces, and so on. The M23-AFC rebels seized the opportunity, claiming to be waging war to prevent Tshisekedi from changing the Constitution.

### **10. Recommendations**

The international community must force the two countries (DRC-Rwanda) to live as good neighbors and not as mutual destabilizers.

Both countries must prioritize dialogue to resolve their conflict. It is in their interest to ban the hateful and violent rhetoric that contributes to inflaming the situation.

Both countries must commit to respecting the inviolability of their borders. And in the case under examination, it is the DRC's borders that are being violated by Rwanda.

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