

Beat: News

DRC: Thousands of people displaced by violence in North Kivu in recent weeks

ReliefWeb Press Release

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ARAC International Global Media Partners - Food distribution and additional assistance is urgently required to prevent further deterioration of people's health

Violent clashes between the M23 armed group and the Congolese army (known by the French acronym FARDC) in the territories of Rutshuru and Nyiragongo, in North Kivu province, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), have forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes in recent weeks. Approximately 117,000 people have been displaced since the end of March 2022, more than half of whom were displaced after violence escalated on May 19, according to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

This recent mass displacement compounds the already precarious situation for displaced people in the two territories, many of whom left everything behind and have sought refuge in schools, churches, or with host families in the community.

Prior to the latest clashes in Nyiragongo, the territory was hosting many people who were displaced by the volcano eruption in May 2021. In Rutshuru, fighting between the M23 and the FARDC at the end of March 2022 had already displaced approximately 50,000 people, about 25,000 of whom fled to Uganda. Most have not yet returned home.

Precarious living conditions

"We are 18 families sleeping together, all crammed into a classroom," said Noélla, who is living with two of her children in the school of Kinoni village, Rutshuru, with almost 350 other families. "We no longer have access to our fields. We eat what we can find, but often it's barely once a day."

In early May, Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) set up a mobile clinic in Kinoni village, near the school where Noélla is staying. The clinic has been running at full capacity.

"We have done more than 2,200 consultations since we started the mobile clinic, meaning we see [about] 120 patients per day," said Four Sassou Madi, MSF's head of mission in DRC. "The main diseases we see are malaria, respiratory infections, and diarrhea."

MSF also organized a distribution of essential items including plastic sheeting, buckets, cooking utensils, and soap for the displaced families staying in Kinoni. Our teams built showers and latrines to improve the living conditions and hygiene in the village.

"Many people who have been displaced tell us that they have difficulty finding enough food," said Four Sassou Madi. "Some have been displaced for over two months now. Displaced people in Rutshuru territory need a food distribution as soon as possible to avoid a further deterioration of their health."

Access to health care and drinking water is a priority

In mid-April, MSF began supporting the health centers in Mungo and Rutsiro localities, Rutshuru, to ensure access to free health care for both the host and displaced communities.

"In April and May, we treated over 1,100 displaced people in the health center," said Ezéchiél Biriko, head nurse at Rutsiro health center. "Some of them walked up to 5 kilometers [about 3 miles] to get here."

Following the recent displacements, MSF is preparing to strengthen its response with water and sanitation activities and additional support to the health center in Rutsiro, where about 6,500 displaced people are staying.

Access to health care and drinking water are also urgently needed in Munigi, Nyiragongo, where 16,000 people have sought refuge, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). MSF is supporting free care to all patients and set up a referral system for urgent cases to a hospital in Goma.

In the last week of May, MSF trucks have brought more than 26,400 gallons of drinking water per day to the health center and two other sites in Munigi where many displaced people have temporarily settled.

"Access to clean water is crucial to limit the risk of water-borne diseases, such as cholera, which is endemic in the region," said Abdou Musengetsi Katumwa, MSF deputy medical coordinator in Goma.

*Armed conflicts, that have affected North Kivu for more than 20 years, continue to impact civilians. MSF has been present in Rutshuru territory since 2005 and is currently supporting four hospitals in Rutshuru, Bwiza, Kibirizi, and Bambu, as well as a dozen health centers. In Goma, our teams have been involved in the cholera response since 2008. *

Source: ReliefWeb, ARAC International global media and strategic partner.

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