

THE RISE OF ARMED GROUPS IN DRC; ANALYSIS OF THE EMERGENCE AND PERSISTENCE OF ARMED GROUPS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE RECURRING CONFLICT IN THE TERRITORY.

Zoe Richard Mauki*

Abstract

Since 1998 to the present time, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has faced ongoing instability due to the persistent activities of numerous armed groups in the territory, making it one of Africa's most enduring humanitarian crisis zones. These militia groups are comprised of local and foreign armed groups, and they are located in the eastern part of the DRC. These armed groups are driven by complex motives, which are political ambitions, ethnic tensions, and economic interests. Their growth and persistence have been shaped by factors such as the aftermath of regional wars, the government's limited control, competition over valuable resources, and unresolved local disputes. The groups are known as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), March 23 Movement popularly known as (M23), Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), and other various groups such as Amka jeshi, and Chini ya Tuna. These groups are frequently involved in severe human rights violations, sexual violence, mass killings, child soldier recruitment, and forced displacement of civilians. Although disarmament initiatives, military campaigns, and peacekeeping missions have been deployed, they have had limited effectiveness due to the complex nature of the conflict and the broader geopolitical landscape. Gaining a clear understanding of the drivers, dynamics, and consequences of these armed actors and the lasting solution to restore peace in the territory is crucial to establishing lasting peace and stability in both the DRC territory and the Great Lakes region.

1.1. Introduction

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is Africa's third-largest country, covering 2.3 million square kilometers¹. It is rich in natural resources, including fertile land, valuable minerals such as copper, cobalt, coltan, diamonds, and gold), major hydroelectric potential,

* Ms. Zoe Richard Mauki is an LLD student at the University of the Western Cape and a lecturer at King Ceasor University, Kampala. Master's from the University of South Africa and a bachelor's degree in law from the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

1 Jean A. P. Clément, *The Democratic Republic of the Congo: Lessons and Challenges for a Country Emerging From War* year 2005, available on [https://www.elibrary.imf.org/configurable/content/book\\$002f9781589062528\\$002fch02.xml?t:ac=book%24002f9781589062528%24002fch02.xml](https://www.elibrary.imf.org/configurable/content/book$002f9781589062528$002fch02.xml?t:ac=book%24002f9781589062528%24002fch02.xml) on 16 August 2025.

and one of the world's largest rainforests². With a population of around 56 million people from over 350 ethnic groups and growing at 3 % a year, it is the fourth most populous country in Africa³. The DRC lies in the Congo River basin and encompasses 11 varied provinces, from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean⁴. Its location and transport links to nine neighbouring countries make it a potential regional economic powerhouse, comparable to other African countries⁵.

The DRC territory is hosting various armed groups that have been destabilising the country for a while now. Since 1998, the Country has not experienced peace. The territory is marred by armed groups that have caused so much damage to the country, which is rich in minerals and precious stones, that one would expect it to be a leading African state with powerful economic growth, but it is the contrary.

For several decades, the country has been in conflict; to date, the country has yet to witness peace. The world is majorly paying attention to other conflicts in other parts of the world; however, the DRC's war is one of the most overwhelming, with so many human atrocities being committed. The atrocities are mainly in the eastern part, and this part of the DRC territory has suffered a devastating effect, and the conflict is overlooked in all aspects. In January 2025, the conflict gained attention when the M23 captured Goma, and allegations rose that Rwanda was supporting this rebel group, although the Rwandan president came out and denied these allegations.

Some scholars suggest that for over three decades, communities in the eastern provinces of the DRC have faced ongoing threats from armed group attacks and recurring inter-community violence⁶. In provinces such as Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika, more than 120 militias and armed factions are currently active⁷. Many of these

- 2 Jean A. P. Clément, *The Democratic Republic of the Congo: Lessons and Challenges for a Country Emerging From War* year 2005 available on [https://www.elibrary.imf.org/configurable/content/book\\$002f9781589062528\\$002fch02.xml?t:ac=book%24002f9781589062528%24002fch02.xml](https://www.elibrary.imf.org/configurable/content/book$002f9781589062528$002fch02.xml?t:ac=book%24002f9781589062528%24002fch02.xml) on 16 August 2025.
- 3 Jean A. P. Clément, *The Democratic Republic of the Congo: Lessons and Challenges for a Country Emerging From War* year 2005 available on [https://www.elibrary.imf.org/configurable/content/book\\$002f9781589062528\\$002fch02.xml?t:ac=book%24002f9781589062528%24002fch02.xml](https://www.elibrary.imf.org/configurable/content/book$002f9781589062528$002fch02.xml?t:ac=book%24002f9781589062528%24002fch02.xml) on 16 August 2025.
- 4 Jean A. P. Clément, *The Democratic Republic of the Congo: Lessons and Challenges for a Country Emerging From War* year 2005 available on [https://www.elibrary.imf.org/configurable/content/book\\$002f9781589062528\\$002fch02.xml?t:ac=book%24002f9781589062528%24002fch02.xml](https://www.elibrary.imf.org/configurable/content/book$002f9781589062528$002fch02.xml?t:ac=book%24002f9781589062528%24002fch02.xml) on 16 August 2025.
- 5 Jean A. P. Clément, *The Democratic Republic of the Congo: Lessons and Challenges for a Country Emerging From War* year 2005 available on [https://www.elibrary.imf.org/configurable/content/book\\$002f9781589062528\\$002fch02.xml?t:ac=book%24002f9781589062528%24002fch02.xml](https://www.elibrary.imf.org/configurable/content/book$002f9781589062528$002fch02.xml?t:ac=book%24002f9781589062528%24002fch02.xml) on 16 August 2025.
- 6 Democratic Republic of the Congo, *population at risk*, available on <https://www.globalr2p.org/count-ries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/> accessed on 12th August 2025.
- 7 Democratic Republic of the Congo, *population at risk*, available on <https://www.globalr2p.org/count-ries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/> accessed on 12th August 2025.

groups are responsible for repeated and severe abuses against civilians, acts that could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity⁸. Scholars further argue that it is not only the non-state actors that are committing these atrocities, but also the government's armed forces, to some extent, were implicated for human rights violations, international humanitarian violations, which also include arbitrary killings, sexual violence offences, torture, and these crimes that may amount to crimes against humanity⁹. Due to all these calamities that are going on in the territory, some scholars have described DRC as 'Africa's Heart of Darkness,' and a "forsaken black hole characterized by calamity, chaos, confusion, and a bizarre form of social cannibalism where society is its prey."¹⁰

My position differs from the foregoing narratives. The current situation in the DRC, while grave, is not without precedent. Numerous states have experienced similar periods of instability in the African continent and other countries on other continents. The international community witnessed the genocide in Rwanda, an atrocity of unspeakable magnitude. Nevertheless, Rwanda was able to recover, rebuild, and is now widely recognised as a model of economic progress and institutional development in Africa. Of course, with its own internal challenges, like other states. Comparable examples can be drawn from countries such as Ethiopia, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Benin, which have all, at various times, experienced severe internal challenges yet demonstrated resilience and the capacity for recovery.

In light of these precedents, the international community must afford the DRC the space and support necessary for national renewal. The DRC possesses the potential to rebuild and foster sustainable economic growth; it is not beyond recovery.

It is also worth emphasising that the DRC's vast geographical size presents unique governance challenges, particularly concerning the central government's capacity to effectively administer the remote and peripheral regions. This physical factor must be taken into account when evaluating the state's ability to manage nationwide stability. The vast land is displayed below.

8 Democratic Republic of the Congo, population at risk, available on <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/> accessed on 12th August 2025.

9 Democratic Republic of the Congo, population at risk, available on <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/> accessed on 12th August 2025.

10 *Vlassenroot, Koen*. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo" *Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet*, 2008 page 1.



DRC map showing the topographical size of its land compared to other neighbouring countries. Available on <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>, accessed on 12th August 2025.

This Article, therefore, examines the emergence of armed groups in the DRC territory, analyses their mission/plans and strategies, and examines the government's response to the rise of these armed groups. Additionally, the analysis of whether, from 1998 to date, the groups have achieved their goals. Further, an analysis of government, non-governmental organisations, the United Nations, and all stakeholders' strategies for achieving lasting peace. The article finally suggests ways to achieve lasting peace that will help to restore sanity and peace in the country to allow developmental activities to take place, build the DRC as a prosperous nation, and restore pride to its territory. It will also enable DRC citizens who sought refuge in other neighbouring countries to return to their home country.

1.2. Emergence of the armed groups in the DRC territory and their motive.

The Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU) is among the oldest yet least recognized armed groups operating in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)¹¹. It is also the only group in the region classified as an Islamist terrorist organization¹². While it does not pose a significant threat to stability like the March 23 Movement (M23), it has successfully resisted the Congolese army since 2010¹³.

11 Policy briefing.

12 Policy briefing.

13 Policy briefing.

The origins of the ADF-NALU trace back to the early Rwenzururu independence movement, which emerged from the Bakonzo community, a marginalized ethnic group in western Uganda. This earlier armed struggle, one of several efforts following Uganda's independence, laid the groundwork for the formation and growth of NALU. Beginning in 1967, the Rwenzururu movement waged a low-level guerrilla campaign seeking formal recognition of the Kingdom of Rwenzururu by the Ugandan government. This conflict officially concluded on August 15, 1982, when Charles Wesley Irema-Ngoma, the Bakonzo's traditional leader (Omusinga), allied with Milton Obote's government, which offered the kingdom autonomy rather than full independence.

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) is believed to be the main Ugandan group involved in the conflict. Although Muslims are a minority in Uganda, the ADF claims to be fighting for an Islamic State there. Like other armed groups, it took advantage of the instability in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to establish its base. In some ways, Uganda's influence in the region is seen through the ADF¹⁴.

The most active armed groups in the region today include M23, Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), ADF, and Cooperative for Development of the Congo (CODECO). This shows that M23 is not the only group affecting the region's power dynamics. For example, CODECO started as an agricultural cooperative but became an ethnic militia supporting the Lendu people against the Hema. It has carried out attacks in Ituri province and now focuses on controlling gold mines and exploiting resources. Another scholar suggests that the presence of the re-emergence of the M23 group, known for committing extensive human rights violations and war crimes against civilians, has heightened regional instability and intensified the militarisation of mining areas.¹⁵

According to existing scholars, between 27 and 40 armed groups exist in the DRC territory¹⁶. Among them, the M23 is considered the largest and the one that draws the government's attention¹⁷. Below are among the existing rebel groups in the DRC. According to Joanne's analysis, the scholars' study dealt with two armed groups situated in the Eastern part of the DRC territory¹⁸. These are Rally for Congolese Democracy situated in Goma

14 MN, Ankitha Lahari, and Nivedita Mahesh. "Rich Land, Poor People: Unravelling the DRC Crisis and the M23 Rebellion.", *Jus Corpus* LJ 5 (2024): 277 at page 283.

15 Democratic Republic of the Congo, population at risk, available on <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/> accessed on 12th August 2025.

16 Alida, Furaha Umutoni. "'Do They Fight for Us?'" Mixed Discourses of Conflict and the M23 Rebellion Among Congolese Rwandophone Refugees in Rwanda.", *African Security* 7, no. 2 (2014): 71–90 at page 72.

17 Alida, Furaha Umutoni. "'Do They Fight for Us?'" Mixed Discourses of Conflict and the M23 Rebellion Among Congolese Rwandophone Refugees in Rwanda.", *African Security* 7, no. 2 (2014): 71–90 at page 72.

18 Richards, Joanne. "Implementing DDR in settings of ongoing conflict: The organization and fragmentation of armed groups in the democratic republic of Congo (DRC).", *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 5, no. 1 (2016): 11–11 at page 2.

(RCD-Goma) and the National Congress for Defence of the People (CNDP)¹⁹. The scholar contends that RCD was later integrated into the DRC national army, and later the armed group was demobilised and returned to the civilian lifestyle, while CNDP remained actively fighting in the Eastern part of the territory²⁰.

Another group is the Coalition Nationale du Peuple pour la Souveraineté du Congo (CNPSC), led by veteran militia leader William Amuri Yakutumba and primarily recruiting from the Bembe community, which quickly gained ground. Within a few months, it inflicted significant losses on the Congolese army and temporarily captured key gold mining sites. Other groups include the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and Abacunguzi Fighting Forces (FOCA), among some of the enduring armed groups in the eastern part of the DRC²¹. Some of the senior leaders of this armed group are believed to have participated in the Rwanda genocide of 1994, making the FDLR's ongoing presence in the DRC a persistent source of conflict between Kinshasa and Kigali²². They are in the DRC to regain political control in Rwanda and safeguard the Rwandan refugee community residing in the DRC²³. This armed group also engaged in controlling mining operations in specific regions, particularly in northern Walikale²⁴. Meanwhile, some FDLR members continue to engage in trade independently, but they no longer share their earnings with the group's leadership²⁵.

Various reasons have been proffered for the emergence of the non-state armed groups. Among them are mineral resources within the DRC territory, as well as political and social power, and gaining control over trading activities²⁶. In line with the pursuit of economic gain, various analysts have argued that the self-sustaining nature of the conflicts in the DRC

- 19 *Richards, Joanne*. "Implementing DDR in settings of ongoing conflict: The organization and fragmentation of armed groups in the democratic republic of Congo (DRC).", *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 5, no. 1 (2016): 11–11 at page 2.
- 20 *Richards, Joanne*. "Implementing DDR in settings of ongoing conflict: The organization and fragmentation of armed groups in the democratic republic of Congo (DRC).", *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 5, no. 1 (2016): 11–11 at page 2.
- 21 *Florquin, Nicolas*. "Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." (2016) at page 1.
- 22 *Florquin, Nicolas*. "Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." (2016) at page 1.
- 23 *Florquin, Nicolas*. "Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." (2016) at page 1.
- 24 *Florquin, Nicolas*. "Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." (2016) at page 2.
- 25 *Florquin, Nicolas*. "Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." (2016) at page 2.
- 26 *Vlassenroot, Koen*. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo". *Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet*, 2008 page 2.

has transformed the nature of violence²⁷. This shift has reportedly led to the systematic criminalisation of warfare, as rebel groups have become more involved in illicit economic activities and formed connections with transnational criminal networks to traffic locally sourced resources²⁸. Consequently, the struggle to control natural resources has heavily influenced the power strategies of these armed actors, who have increasingly sought to establish territorial control over resource-rich areas and key trade routes²⁹. Some scholars contend that these strategies closely resembled the practices of Mobutu's political regime, highlighting the consistent historical patterns of destructive governance in the DRC³⁰.

Even during the time of Kabila, Kabila faced significant opposition from numerous armed groups. During the Second Congolese War (1998–2003) in particular, control over the extraction and trade of natural resources emerged as a major challenge for the various warring factions³¹. New military leaders sought to take over the remnants of Mobutu's redistribution networks to gain access to resource exploitation and dominate informal trade systems³².

Apart from fighting for mineral's strategic locations, according to Umutoni Alida, some of these armed groups, such as M23, claim to be fighting to put pressure on the peace agreement, which was signed on March 23, 2009, between CNDP and the DRC government, to be fully implemented³³. Two key concerns that are crucial in the M23's stance regarding this agreement are: the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, and the ongoing discrimination and insecurity issues faced by Congolese Rwandophones, which they argue make returning to their homes unsafe³⁴.

The scholar further contends that although M23 is claiming to represent the interests of all Congolese, much like Nkunda did in 2009, the rebel group continues to assert that their struggle was primarily on behalf of Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese, particularly

- 27 Vlassenroot, Koen. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo". Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008 page 3.
- 28 Vlassenroot, Koen. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo". Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008 page 3.
- 29 Vlassenroot, Koen. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo. Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008 page 3.
- 30 Vlassenroot, Koen. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo". Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008 page 3.
- 31 Policy brief, Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU's Lost Rebellion, Africa Briefing N°93 Nairobi/Brussels, 19 December 2012. Translation from French 2012.
- 32 Policy brief, Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU's Lost Rebellion, Africa Briefing N°93 Nairobi/Brussels, 19 December 2012. Translation from French 2012.
- 33 Alida, Furaha Umutoni. "Do They Fight for Us?" Mixed Discourses of Conflict and the M23 Rebellion Among Congolese Rwandophone Refugees in Rwanda.", *African Security* 7, no. 2 (2014): 71–90 at page 72.
- 34 Alida, Furaha Umutoni. "Do They Fight for Us?" Mixed Discourses of Conflict and the M23 Rebellion Among Congolese Rwandophone Refugees in Rwanda.", *African Security* 7, no. 2 (2014): 71–90 at page 80

the Tutsis from Rwanda, who they claim face widespread discrimination in the DRC territory³⁵. However, there is limited information on how the communities they claim to represent perceive these claims³⁶. Meanwhile, some public statements have emerged on the issue, stating that the voices of the refugees that M23 claims to defend have been largely missing from reports on the conflict³⁷. Not only M23, which claims to fight for the Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese in the DRC, but also other groups such as RCD and CNDP, also claim the same³⁸. There are also allegations of the DRC's illegitimate power, that some of the CNDP are fighting to take power in Kinshasa³⁹.

Similar to the ADF, soldiers involved in the Rwenzori Operation are frequently accused of engaging in one of the key cross-border commercial activities between the DRC and Uganda, that is, the timber trade⁴⁰. Allegedly operating under the guise of protecting local communities, FARDC troops have been suspected of illegally exploiting timber resources in Mambasa territory, located in the eastern province, as well as extorting money from local farmers and businessmen in Beni⁴¹. Accusations of collaboration between Congolese military officials and the ADF are common in the region⁴². In 2010, General Kakolele, then FARDC chief of staff in Butembo, reportedly travelled to Nairobi, where he is said to have met with members of the Mai-Mai militias and the ADF⁴³. Hence, on top of the rebel

- 35 Alida, Furaha Umutoni. "Do They Fight for Us?" Mixed Discourses of Conflict and the M23 Rebellion Among Congolese Rwandophone Refugees in Rwanda.", *African Security* 7, no. 2 (2014): 71–90 at page 73.
- 36 Alida, Furaha Umutoni. "Do They Fight for Us?" Mixed Discourses of Conflict and the M23 Rebellion Among Congolese Rwandophone Refugees in Rwanda.", *African Security* 7, no. 2 (2014): 71–90 at page 73.
- 37 Alida, Furaha Umutoni. "Do They Fight for Us?" Mixed Discourses of Conflict and the M23 Rebellion Among Congolese Rwandophone Refugees in Rwanda.", *African Security* 7, no. 2 (2014): 71–90 at page 73.
- 38 Alida, Furaha Umutoni. "Do They Fight for Us?" Mixed Discourses of Conflict and the M23 Rebellion Among Congolese Rwandophone Refugees in Rwanda.", *African Security* 7, no. 2 (2014): 71–90 at page 75.
- 39 Alida, Furaha Umutoni. "Do They Fight for Us?" Mixed Discourses of Conflict and the M23 Rebellion Among Congolese Rwandophone Refugees in Rwanda.", *African Security* 7, no. 2 (2014): 71–90 at page 76.
- 40 Policy brief, Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU's Lost Rebellion, Africa Briefing N°93 Nairobi/Brussels, 19 December 2012. Translation from French 2012.
- 41 Policy brief, Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU's Lost Rebellion, Africa Briefing N°93 Nairobi/Brussels, 19 December 2012. Translation from French 2012.
- 42 Policy brief, Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU's Lost Rebellion, Africa Briefing N°93 Nairobi/Brussels, 19 December 2012. Translation from French 2012.
- 43 Policy brief, Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU's Lost Rebellion, Africa Briefing N°93 Nairobi/Brussels, 19 December 2012. Translation from French 2012.

groups picking interest in minerals and trans -border trade, they were also interested in the timber business⁴⁴.

Various scholars have analysed the impacts of the armed groups' activities in the communities they operate in. According to Stearns and Vogel, the scholars suggest that the conflict has contributed to the internal displacement of 4,1 million people and 550,000 displaced persons only in the last three months⁴⁵. Kavulikirwa's analysis of the impact of these armed groups is on how they have affected the health care system⁴⁶. The scholar contended that armed conflict disrupts healthcare systems, impacting both healthcare facilities and healthcare workers, resulting in the loss of millions of lives, deepening poverty in communities, and weakening disease surveillance networks⁴⁷. This harmful situation poses a major obstacle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Universal Health Coverage, by denying millions of Congolese access to essential health services⁴⁸. Additionally, the direct consequences of insecurity undermine Global Health Security by contributing to environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, which in turn heighten the risk of disease outbreaks⁴⁹.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that the ongoing conflict is geographically concentrated. The instability primarily affects the eastern provinces, whereas the central, southern, north-western, and western regions of the DRC remain largely stable, with normal economic and social activities continuing undisturbed.

- 44 Policy brief, Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU's Lost Rebellion, Africa Briefing N°93 Nairobi/Brussels, 19 December 2012. Translation from French 2012.
- 45 Stearns, Jason, and Christoph Vogel. "The landscape of armed groups in Eastern Congo: fragmented, politicized networks.", Kivu Security Tracker (KST) 2017 (2017) at page 1.
- 46 Kavulikirwa, Olivier Kambere. "Intersecting realities: Exploring the nexus between armed conflicts in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Global Health.", *One Health* 19 (2024): 100849.
- 47 Kavulikirwa, Olivier Kambere. "Intersecting realities: Exploring the nexus between armed conflicts in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Global Health.", *One Health* 19 (2024): 100849.
- 48 Kavulikirwa, Olivier Kambere. "Intersecting realities: Exploring the nexus between armed conflicts in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Global Health.", *One Health* 19 (2024): 100849.
- 49 Kavulikirwa, Olivier Kambere. "Intersecting realities: Exploring the nexus between armed conflicts in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Global Health.", *One Health* 19 (2024): 100849.



A map showing areas affected by the war in the DRC territory. Available on <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/democratic-republic-of-the-congo> accessed on 13th August 2025.

During the Congolese war, the extreme levels of violence and the increased targeting of civilians happened even at the grassroots level, which led to security and protection

becoming subjects of negotiation between rebel forces and the local community⁵⁰. As early as the 1990s, following President Mobutu's announcement of a democratization process, rural militias began to emerge in eastern Zaire⁵¹. Principally, these groups functioned primarily as protection units, serving the interests of local politicians, often in collaboration with traditional chiefs⁵².

However, as political rivalry and ethnic tensions over access to key resources, like land, intensified, these militia groups increasingly evolved into ethnic-based defence forces⁵³. Typically recruiting along ethnic lines and primarily from indigenous Congolese populations, their composition often reflected the local demographic makeup⁵⁴. With the outbreak of the Congolese war, these militias became entangled in the broader political-military conflict. Local ethnic groups now found themselves needing protection not only from rival communities but also from foreign troops and their Congolese allies occupying significant parts of the country⁵⁵. In some instances, the leadership of the militia group would go as far as protecting the rural population, at the same time exploiting the mineral resources and prompting change in the existing rural orders⁵⁶.

1.3. What is the government, UN Agencies, and other stakeholders doing about the rise of these armed groups and to restore peace in the DRC territory?

According to Joanne Richards, the DRC government formulated a policy on disarmament in 2003⁵⁷. In December 2003, the Congolese government formed a National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration to serve as the main body responsible for developing and executing the National Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Plan⁵⁸. This plan, officially adopted in May 2004, aimed at addressing the disarmament and

50 *Vlassenroot, Koen*. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo". Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008 page 10.

51 *Vlassenroot, Koen*. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo". Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008 page 10.

52 *Vlassenroot, Koen*. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo". Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008 page 10.

53 *Vlassenroot, Koen*. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo". Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008 page 10.

54 *Vlassenroot, Koen*. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo". Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008 page 10.

55 *Vlassenroot, Koen*. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo". Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008 page 1.

56 *Vlassenroot, Koen*. "Armed groups and militias in eastern DR Congo". Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008 page 11.

57 *Richards, Joanne*. "Implementing DDR in settings of ongoing conflict: The organization and fragmentation of armed groups in the democratic republic of Congo (DRC)." 2016 page 8.

58 *Richards, Joanne*. "Implementing DDR in settings of ongoing conflict: The organization and fragmentation of armed groups in the democratic republic of Congo (DRC)." 2016 page 8.

reintegration of groups that were signatories to the Global and Inclusive Peace Agreement, including the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD)-Goma⁵⁹.

Conversely, the United Nations also advocated for voluntary disarmament. The United Nations established a Force Intervention Brigade in 2013, as part of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC, for voluntary disarmament⁶⁰. This force was specifically mandated to launch targeted military operations against armed groups in eastern DRC, including the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)⁶¹. The voluntary disarmament process was initiated in 2014. While some analysts viewed this move as a tactic to delay what they saw as an inevitable military confrontation, sources close to the FDLR claimed it reflected a strategic decision by the group's political wing, which preferred pursuing political solutions⁶².

Florquin contends that the initial disarmament began in May 2014, when FDLR members surrendered in Kateku, North Kivu. In June, more armed members further surrendered in Kigogo, South Kivu⁶³. Through this process, 339 combatants were demobilized, and 253 weapons were handed over⁶⁴. Although MONUSCO initially advocated for the return of these ex-combatants to Rwanda, the FDLR leadership was against the idea. By December 2015, the demobilized fighters and their families remained in camps in Kanyabayonga, Kisangani, and Walungu, with no clear resolution to their situation⁶⁵.

According to Joanne, the demobilization exercise was not done without challenges. It is important to highlight that not all former combatants were willing to disarm and demobilize⁶⁶. Some, especially ex-child soldiers who had worked as close assistants to the high-ranking officers, expressed that life was more manageable and secure for them as fighters than it was as civilians⁶⁷.

59 Richards, Joanne. "Implementing DDR in settings of ongoing conflict: The organization and fragmentation of armed groups in the democratic republic of Congo (DRC)." 2016 page 8.

60 Florquin, Nicolas. "Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." (2016) at 2.

61 Florquin, Nicolas. "Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." (2016) at 2.

62 Florquin, Nicolas. "Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." (2016) at 2.

63 Florquin, Nicolas. "Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." (2016) at 2.

64 Florquin, Nicolas. "Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." (2016) at 2.

65 Florquin, Nicolas. "Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." (2016) at 2.

66 Richards, Joanne. "Demobilization in the DRC: Armed Groups and the Role of Organizational Control". Small Arms Survey, 2022 page 9.

67 Richards, Joanne. "Demobilization in the DRC: Armed Groups and the Role of Organizational Control". Small Arms Survey, 2022 page 9.



Former combatants showing their official demobilization cards, Goma, July 2011. © Joanne Richards available on the article by Joanne Richards. *Demobilization in the DRC: Armed Groups and the Role of Organizational Control*. Small Arms Survey, 2022, page 6.

Shepherd examined various efforts that were put in place by the UN and also the neighbouring states. The scholar stated that the UN approved the forced eviction of the armed troops⁶⁸. The Scholar stated that different views of the conflict led to different and sometimes opposing ways of trying to solve it. Starting in late 2012, peace talks were held in Kampala, Uganda, between the M23 and the Congolese government⁶⁹. These talks were led by a regional group that included both Rwanda and Uganda. At the same time, Congo's allies in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) focused on supporting a military solution to defeat the M23⁷⁰. The broader international community and the UN tried to combine both approaches; they supported the Kampala talks but also worked to stop

68 Shepherd, Ben. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194.

69 Shepherd, Ben. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194.

70 Shepherd, Ben. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194.

Rwanda's involvement and to maintain regional stability. Eventually, the UN approved a SADC military intervention through a Security Council resolution⁷¹.

The Addis Ababa PSC Framework introduced a new peace strategy for the DRC and the Great Lakes region⁷². It outlines the responsibilities of the DRC government and neighbouring countries in achieving lasting peace. At the same time, it guides how the international community, led by the UN, should respond to the ongoing crisis in eastern DRC⁷³. UN Resolution 2098 created a special intervention brigade within MONUSCO. This brigade is responsible for neutralizing armed groups in eastern DRC, helping to reduce threats to security and allowing for stabilization efforts to begin⁷⁴.

Together with all these efforts that were made by the United Nations and the government, there are also various peace agreements that were reached between the warring parties and the government. The agreements are listed below.

1.3.1. Agreements between governments and non-state armed Groups.

- i) Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement of 1999. Available at: <<https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/cd990710lusakaagreement.pdf>>. This was a Ceasefire Agreement. The agreement states that 'the cessation of hostilities between all the belligerent forces in the DRC, as provided for in (his Cease-fire Agreement (hereinafter referred to as "the Agreement")); Effective cessation of hostilities, military movements and reinforcement'.
- ii) Pretoria Accord of 2002. Available at:<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/drc_rwanda_pa07302002.pdf>. This was a peace agreement between the DRC and Rwanda.
- iii) 'Peace Agreement Between the Governments of the Republic of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the Withdrawal of the Rwandan Troops from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Dismantling of the Ex-FAR and Interahamwe Forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)'.
- iv) 'The Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement of 1999 sets out modalities for the tracking down and disarmament of ex-FAR and Interahamwe forces in the territory of the DRC. To

71 *Shepherd, Ben*. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194.

72 *Koko, Sadiki*. "The Mouvement du 23 Mars and the dynamics of a failed insurgency in the Democratic Republic of Congo.", *South African Journal of International Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2014): 261–278 at page 265.

73 *Koko, Sadiki*. "The Mouvement du 23 Mars and the dynamics of a failed insurgency in the Democratic Republic of Congo.", *South African Journal of International Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2014): 261–278 at page 265.

74 *Koko, Sadiki*. "The Mouvement du 23 Mars and the dynamics of a failed insurgency in the Democratic Republic of Congo.", *South African Journal of International Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2014): 261–278 at page 265.

date, it has not been possible to effectively implement the decisions relating to these armed groups’

- v) Global and All-Inclusive Agreement (2002 – Sun City Agreement) available at; <<https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/cd021216global20and20inclusive20agreement20on20transition20in20drc.pdf>> Cessation of Hostilities Global and Inclusive Agreement on Transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. ‘We, the various elements and entities involved in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, Parties to this Agreement: the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC), the political opposition, civil society, the Congolese Rally for Democracy/Liberation Movement (RDC/ML), the Congolese Rally for Democracy/National (RCD/N), the Mai-Mai; forces, namely the Government of the DRC, the RCD, the MLC, the RDC-ML, the RCD-N, and the Mai-Mai, renew their commitment, in accordance with the Lusaka Agreement, the Kampala Withdrawal Plan, the Harare Sub-Agreement and the relevant Security Council Resolutions, to cease hostilities and to seek a peaceful and equitable solution to the crisis that the country is facing’.
- vi) March 23 Agreement (2009) Available at; < <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/cd090323peace20agreement20between20the20government20and20the20cndp.pdf>> This was a Peace Agreement between the Government and le Congres National pour la defense du People (CNDP).
- vii) Framework Agreement for Peace, Security and Cooperation for the DRC and the Region (Addis Ababa Agreement) (2013) Available at; <https://ungreatlakes.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/peace_security_and_cooperation_framework_agreement_0.pdf> Peace Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region. These are the agreements so far that were introduced between the DRC government and the non-state armed groups, while others were done with the neighbouring countries, such as Rwanda.

In the efforts to bring peace in the DRC, there are also United Nations Resolutions that were for purposes of cease fire. Such as;

1.3.2. UN RESOLUTIONS.

- i) Resolution 1325 of 2000, adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000 Available at < <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20SRES1325%20.pdf>>.
- ii) Resolution 1701 of 2006 available at < https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_res_17012006.pdf>
- iii) Resolution 2149 of 2014 – Central African Republic available at < <https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/resolution-2149-central-african-republic-s-res-2149/>>. This resolution aimed to establish the deployment of the UN Multidimensional Integrated

Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) that will facilitate a deployment of the initial period, which was April 2015.

All these were the efforts that were made by the DRC government and the United Nations to see that peace is restored in the DRC territory; however, to this date, the efforts have been in vain. Below, the analysis proposes other measures that the government can try to see if they can possibly bring peace to the DRC territory.

In January 2025, the world witnessed the taking of Goma by the M23, which committed several human rights abuses. Civilians were arrested while others disappeared, and some people were trying to trace their loved ones, with no success. This shows that the M23 activities are still ongoing in Goma, the Eastern part of the DRC, near the Rwanda border. There are various allegations that Rwanda is backing up this rebel group, and the group promised the civilians a better life, who, for a long time, were subjected to violence. Hence, it is recommended that the government come up with better measures and find a way of having these disputes resolved once and for all, to have a lasting peace. The government has two options: either to use force to disarm all the armed groups or to go for negotiation, which is the most recommended one.

1.4. Why is the war in the DRC never-ending?

The DRC Government has undertaken significant efforts aimed at bringing an end to the ongoing conflict involving rebel factions within its territory. Regional actors, including neighbouring countries such as Uganda and Ethiopia, have intervened in an attempt to facilitate a resolution to the hostilities. Additionally, the United Nations adopted Security Council Resolution 2098, which was specifically intended to address and manage the conflict between the two parties involved.

Despite these concerted efforts, the situation on the ground remains volatile, and the DRC continues to experience persistent violence and instability. This enduring state of conflict raises a critical question: What essential measures has the DRC government failed to implement effectively in its pursuit of sustainable peace?

Prunier contends that although peace efforts were made, the major African war never truly ended⁷⁵. In the Congo's eastern provinces, North and South Kivu, bordering Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, there are many ethnic groups, including a large number of Banyarwanda⁷⁶. These are Congolese citizens who are ethnically Rwandans. Movement between them and Rwanda was common during and after the war⁷⁷. The scholar further states that the region became filled with militias and mining groups. Rwanda backed some,

75 Gérard Prunier Council, Atlantic. "Why the Congo Matters", Atlantic Council 2016 at page 4.

76 Gérard Prunier Council, Atlantic. "Why the Congo Matters", Atlantic Council 2016 at page 4.

77 Gérard Prunier Council, Atlantic. "Why the Congo Matters", Atlantic Council 2016 at page 4.

while others were ethnic militias trying to resist Rwandan influence. Many groups were simply criminals⁷⁸.

Shepherd analysed the challenges that M23 faces, which make it difficult to reach any peaceful agreement. The scholar argues that the main difficulty in dealing with the M23 crisis was the unclear nature of the group⁷⁹. People disagreed about what the M23 was, why it existed, and whether it was legitimate, making it hard to choose the right response⁸⁰. Some saw M23 as a reaction to government failure, corruption, and abuse, especially against the Congolese people of Rwandan origin⁸¹. They believed the complaints were valid and could be addressed through negotiation⁸². The scholar contends further that others view M23 as just another Rwandan-backed rebel group, serving Rwanda's interests, and believes it should be dealt with through military force⁸³.

The scholar further argues that when states choose to engage in peace talks, it might not be of much help. The scholar cited the example of the Kampala peace talks of 2012, which looked vital in ending the escalation⁸⁴. However, the attempt to seek peace through an illegitimate local actor and a national government was more to lend credibility to the M23⁸⁵. In case the deal had gone through, it would have looked like a temporary solution⁸⁶. This is because M23 alone is the outcome of a failed peace deal. Hence, if the parties have

78 *Gérard Prunier Council*, Atlantic. "Why the Congo Matters", Atlantic Council 2016 at page 4.

79 *Shepherd, Ben*. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194 at page 3.

80 *Shepherd, Ben*. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194 at page 3.

81 *Shepherd, Ben*. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194 at page 3.

82 *Shepherd, Ben*. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194 at page 3.

83 *Shepherd, Ben*. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194 at page 3.

84 *Shepherd, Ben*. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194 at page 4.

85 *Shepherd, Ben*. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194 at page 4.

86 *Shepherd, Ben*. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study.", *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194 at page 4.

to consider a peace deal, the legality of the parties must be assessed because of the potential for misguided peace talks that can hardly resolve the existing conflict⁸⁷.

1.5. Analysis of whether since 1998 to date, the armed groups have achieved their goals.

It is submitted that, since 1998, non-state armed groups operating within the territory of the DRC have failed to achieve their principal strategic objectives⁸⁸. While some of these entities have, at various times, attained limited tactical successes or exercised de facto control over discrete geographic areas, their broader aims namely, the overthrow of the central government, the establishment of sustained territorial sovereignty, or the creation of an independent political entity have not been accomplished in a manner that is durable or recognized under international law⁸⁹. The prevailing security situation remains marked by a high degree of fragmentation, with a multiplicity of armed actors engaged in ongoing hostilities for control of resources and territory. This has resulted in a protracted state of insecurity, widespread violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and the continued displacement of civilian populations⁹⁰.

From the foregoing analysis, while non-state armed groups operating within the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have, at times, achieved limited tactical gains and inflicted significant harm upon the civilian population, they have not realized their principal strategic objectives, including regime change, sustained territorial control, or the establishment of an independent state⁹¹. The conflict remains a multifaceted and evolving situation, characterized by ongoing violations of international law and widespread humanitarian consequences⁹². A durable resolution necessitates a comprehensive, multi-dimensional response that addresses both the underlying structural causes of the conflict and the urgent humanitarian and protection needs of affected populations, following international legal

87 *Shepherd, Ben*. "Elite bargains and political deals project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) case study." *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study* (2018): 188–194 at page 4.

88 Congo, DR Country Report 2024 available on <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/COD> accessed 11th August 2025.

89 *Carayannis, Tatiana*. "The Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1996–2012." In *Responding to conflict in Africa: The United Nations and regional organizations*, pp. 177–202. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013.

90 *Carayannis, Tatiana*. "The Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1996–2012." In *Responding to conflict in Africa: The United Nations and regional organizations*, pp. 177–202. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013.

91 Center for Preventive Action Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Updated June 09 2025, available on <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo>, accessed on 16th August 2025.

92 Center for Preventive Action Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Updated June 09 2025, available on <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo>, accessed on 16th August 2025.

standards⁹³. With one million Congolese refugees abroad and 21 million people in urgent need of food, medical care, and other help, the DRC territory is facing one of the world's largest and deadliest humanitarian crises⁹⁴.

1.6. Strategies of achieving lasting peace.

According to Bahoze 'a socio-economic approach to peace in the DRC must promote social justice that is based on an equitable distribution of economic resources and wealth to the Congolese people. This requires the implementation of social development policies that promote greater access to basic infrastructures and put an end to social inequalities and marginalization of vulnerable sections of the population. It is also necessary to promote the diversification of the domestic economy away from the production of primary commodities and raw materials for export and take concrete steps towards expansion into the small, medium, and large-scale manufacturing and service sectors'⁹⁵.

On the issue of the culture of violence, the scholar argues that to replace a culture of violence with one of peace, the DRC needs reconciliation and national healing⁹⁶. One way to do this is through transitional justice, such as setting up truth and reconciliation commissions. These bodies can investigate past human rights abuses, help victims and perpetrators come to terms, and stop the ongoing cycle of violence and atrocities⁹⁷.

Further, 'It should be up to the Congolese people to declare their agenda for the DRC to the rest of the world, rather than the reverse. The DRC state needs to be strengthened to defend its sovereignty and guarantee the freedom of the Congolese to decide on their economic, social, and cultural priorities and policies. Consolidating unity and peace within the country will help address the issue of the role played by meddling neighbors and international actors'⁹⁸.

93 Center for Preventive Action Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Updated June 09 2025, available on <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo>, accessed on 16th August 2025.

94 Center for Preventive Action Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Updated June 09 2025, available on <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo>, accessed on 16th August 2025.

95 *Olivier Bahoze*, "Strategies for Building Inclusive Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: A Reflection", available on <https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2021/10/13/strategies-for-building-inclusive-peace-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-a-reflection/> accessed on 18th August 2025.

96 *Olivier Bahoze*, "Strategies for Building Inclusive Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: A Reflection", available on <https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2021/10/13/strategies-for-building-inclusive-peace-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-a-reflection/> accessed on 18th August 2025.

97 *Olivier Bahoze*, "Strategies for Building Inclusive Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: A Reflection", available on <https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2021/10/13/strategies-for-building-inclusive-peace-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-a-reflection/> accessed on 18th August 2025.

98 *Olivier Bahoze*, "Strategies for Building Inclusive Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: A Reflection", available on <https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2021/10/13/strategies-for-building-inclusive-peace-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-a-reflection/> accessed on 18th August 2025.

1.7. Conclusion

While ceasefire agreements and power-sharing arrangements constitute important components of peacebuilding efforts, they are insufficient in isolation. Sustainable peace in the DRC necessitates the comprehensive resolution of structural drivers of conflict, including land tenure disputes, systemic ethnic exclusion, weak governance frameworks, and the effective disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants. These underlying issues must be addressed through inclusive, legally binding mechanisms that promote long-term peace.

The above-mentioned failed peace agreements were contributed by lack of robust mechanisms. To ensure compliance and efficacy, peace agreements must incorporate provisions for independent monitoring bodies with clearly defined mandates, benchmarks, and timeframes, alongside enforceable sanctions for non-compliance. Furthermore, accountability for gross violations of international humanitarian law and human rights is imperative. Perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious offenses must be subject to investigation and prosecution in accordance with domestic and international legal standards, in order to combat impunity and restore public confidence in the law.

Given the transnational nature of the conflict in the DRC, regional dynamics play a decisive role in perpetuating or resolving hostilities. It is therefore essential that neighbouring states cease all forms of direct or indirect support to non-state armed groups operating within Congolese territory. Regional cooperation must be strengthened through legally binding agreements under the patronage of regional organizations such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). These organizations should be empowered to facilitate dialogue, coordinate peacebuilding initiatives, and oversee the implementation of regional security agreements aimed at fostering durable peace and stability across the Great Lakes region.