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## **DRC: History must not repeat itself as violence flares in North Kivu**

The Congolese government must immediately take measures to protect civilians, including thousands of displaced people, following the fall of a town in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) by members of the M23 armed group, Amnesty International has said.

The call came after M23 soldiers reportedly took control of Bunagana in Rutshuru territory, a strategic town close to the border with Uganda, following heavy fighting with Congolese army (FARDC) troops over several days.

A peacekeeper from the Indian contingent of the UN mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) died after being hit by artillery shell shrapnel during the fighting 50km north of Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu province, UN officials reported.

About 600 FARDC soldiers are said to have fled to Uganda after they were overwhelmed by the soldiers from M23, which is led by Sultani Makenga and Bosco Ntaganda, and composed of deserters from the Congolese army, who mostly belonged to the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) which integrated into the FARDC in 2009.

Amnesty said the fact FARDC soldiers fled to Uganda is a matter of concern and again weakened the Congolese army's ability to protect efficiently the civilian population from an armed group whose capacity seems to have strengthened.

"There is a grim feeling that history is repeating itself with ex-CNDP members managing to control several strategic axes as they did in 2008," said Paule Rigaud, the Programme Director for Africa at Amnesty International.

"Five years ago, a similar situation led to serious atrocities, among them the Kiwanja massacre, during which at least 150 civilians were killed by the CNDP."

"Amnesty International is deeply concerned that more people are now being displaced by the fighting, adding to those who have been forced to flee over the past months, and that there is an increasing risk civilians may be caught in the crossfire."

There is growing concern over the increased strength of the M23, which is reportedly planning to retake key towns, including in Masisi territory - the former stronghold of the CNDP.

"It is quite worrying that about 600 Congolese soldiers fled to Uganda while the M23 was attacking the area."

"The Congolese government, through its security forces, should immediately take measures to ensure the

protection of civilians. The UN through MONUSCO should continue to increase its presence in areas under threat and implement its protection mechanisms to prevent violence against the civilian population”, Rigaud said.

Background:

The CNDP controlled most of the Masisi and Rutshuru territories by the end of 2008 and threatened to attack Goma.

The armed group was then integrated into the FARDC following a peace agreement signed on 23 March 2009 with the Congolese Government.

Defections from the FARDC began in April 2012. Deserters launched military operations against the Congolese army shortly afterwards.