



## **Contribution for the visit of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons to the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The ECLJ submits this report in response to the call of Paula Gaviria Betancur, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, for input regarding the visit of the Special Rapporteur to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (19-30 May 2025).

The following information has been compiled from firsthand data as relayed from our on the ground source, Africa New Day, a non-profit operating in Goma, Eastern DRC, determined to end the cycles of violence, poverty, and inequality fostered by lack of knowledge, bad governance, and the absence of opportunities through sustainable and long-term solutions. Africa New Day operates in the DRC and interacts directly in the region with IDPs and has direct knowledge of the concerns addressed herein.

### **BACKGROUND**

The eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is once again sinking into violence. The M23 rebel group launched a large-scale offensive on the province of North Kivu in early January 2025, leading to the deaths of 7,000 Congolese and the displacement of half a million people.

The chaos has enabled Islamist terrorist groups, including the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) to escalate targeted killings and religious persecution. The ADF, a former Ugandan rebel group affiliated with the Islamic state since 2019, which has been recognized as a terrorist group by the United States and the United Nations, has carried out massacres and abductions, particularly targeting Christian communities.

In eastern DRC, civilian populations, particularly Christian communities, are caught between the atrocities committed by Islamist terrorists on one side and the clashes between the Congolese government forces and the M23 on the other. UNICEF reported nearly 600 cases of

rape in a single week following the fall of Goma, with M23 rebels and Congolese forces among the perpetrators.

On February 15, 2025, more than 70 Christian civilians were beheaded inside a Protestant church in Kasanga, North Kivu. The victims, primarily women, children, and the elderly, had been abducted days earlier from the village of Mayba by ADF militants. This brutal massacre is part of a wider pattern of religious persecution in the region. In June 2024, the ADF massacred 150 Congolese, including many Christians, in North Kivu using gunfire and machetes. Pope Francis condemned these attacks, calling the victims “martyrs of the faith.”

This major humanitarian crisis in the DRC is fueled by ongoing conflict in the East, recurrent natural disasters, and disease epidemics. As the Congolese state is too weak to protect its population, the UN launched an appeal on February 27, 2025, for \$2.54 billion (2.44 billion euros) to assist 11 million people.

## **INFORMATION ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT SITUATIONS IN THE DRC RESULTING FROM ANY AND ALL CAUSES**

This report provides information pertaining to the following question numbers as outlined in the Special Rapporteur’s call for input:

### **2. Available data and evidence on internal displacement, including overall and disaggregated figures, trends, and causes of displacement:**

- IDP numbers are notoriously underreported. We have been told accounts of those surviving ADF attacks on villages fleeing the village and hiding, searching for food and safety. The numbers of such survivors are unknowable.
- There are roughly 7.3 million IDPs currently within DRC with more Congolese declaring refugee status abroad.
- There are an estimated 700,000 refugees since the start of 2025 due to rapid escalation of conflict with M23.
- The main driver of displacement in eastern Congo is violence and insecurity, however, there remains displacement due to natural disasters as well (ie. 2023 Kalehe floods, volcanic eruptions).
- Many IDP camps lack central authority structures, oversight, and adequate policing within the camp.

### **3. Key protection issues confronting internally displaced persons, including physical safety and security, human rights challenges, access to legal assistance and justice, and other relate[d] issues:**

- *Physical safety/security:* Lack of proper police force, authority structures, and central authority oversight allows for rampant violence and abuse within IDP camps. Further complicating this issue are the lack of necessary resources and support. As women and children travel further distances for food, water, and healthcare, they drastically increase their risk of assault from militant groups in eastern Congo. Additionally, non-violent crimes also flourish within IDP camps as communities lack the protection or ability to obtain justice to deter individuals.

- Human rights: IDP camps lack protection from bodily harm, crucial support services, access to sustainable WASH programs, and a voice in both government matters and issues pertaining to their communities as voting from IDP camps is heavily restricted.
- Legal assistance: Need for legal assistance (particularly in cases of land ownership and gender-based violence) far outpaces availability. Furthermore, lack of adequate police force, especially within IDP camps, makes reporting crimes, gathering evidence, and arresting alleged perpetrators difficult. The justice system lacks the capacity to deal with sheer numbers of cases.

**4. Standards of living and access to basic services for internally displaced persons, including healthcare, psychosocial support, adequate food, water, sanitation, electricity, housing, livelihoods, social services and benefits:**

- Most IDP camps are not able to meet basic needs – significant lack of adequate medical attention, food, sustainable WASH programs, social services, and adequate housing.
- Various NGOs are working to meet needs of IDP communities, but need grossly outpaces capacity, especially with rapid decreases in international funding.
- Lack of localization and coordination among NGOs has led to inefficiencies - unnecessary doubling of efforts (ex/ providing mosquito nets many times), poor planning, lack of long-term sustainability.
- The inherent nature of IDP camps creates a system without necessary infrastructure. This complicates delivery of aid, crucial services, and utilities such as electricity and water systems.

**5. Participation of internally displaced persons in decisions and processes that affect them, including peace processes:**

- IDPs consistently lack any ability for input or collaboration over decisions directly affecting them.
- In a humanitarian context, traditional models of aid have implemented the programs that they believe will best meet the needs of IDP communities but seldom talk to the communities to fully understand the needs present. This often results in millions in wasted humanitarian funds as IDPs have often received the same aid from different organizations over and over again and recipients then work to sell the excess to actually provide for their needs. Although the localization of aid is a promising way to better address these issues, the INGO sector remains far behind the Grand Bargain's goal of localizing 25% of aid by 2025.
- In the peacemaking process, IDPs also remain sidelined. However, this poses unique challenges to better address their participation.
- Especially in Eastern Congo with over 7 million IDPs, many of whom are in unofficial IDP settlements, we must overcome the following challenges in order to improve their political/peace talk representation.
  - Who acts as representatives of diverse, mobile IDP communities?
  - How do IDP community leaders attend peace talks without income, transportation, or support?
  - The needs of IDPs will differ greatly from settlement to settlement as well as by ethnic/tribal group within each settlement. In this case, how are the overall aims of

IDPs agreed upon? Especially without any systems for voting across populations in IDP camps.

**8. Gender issues and sexual and gender-based violence in the context of displacement, such as rape, forced and early marriage, sexual exploitation and human trafficking:**

- Reports show that from January through February 2025, a child was SA'd every 30 mins.
- Immense amounts of SA and abuse of women and children - primarily carried out by armed actors (both non-state armed groups and FARDC).
- This becomes especially prevalent in IDP camps.
  - With lack of resources, women and children travel long distances for resources. The further the distance travelled, the greater chance of assault.
    - Lack of resources often force many women and young girls into survival sex.
  - With the lack of police within IDP camps, the ability for some individuals to abuse others without facing deterrents or repercussions is extremely high.
  - Whenever the need to escape an area increases, so does the prevalence of human trafficking.
    - Human trafficking numbers are grossly underreported worldwide.
    - As IDPs look to escape to other countries to avoid violence, they often take high-risk opportunities.

**9. Durable solutions, with a particular focus on the conditions for the safe and voluntary return of IDPs, local integration or settlement elsewhere in the country and the progress made towards achieving durable solutions:**

- Need for greater control over mineral resources that allow the government to collect funds necessary to finance projects, government agencies, pay bureaucrats, keep paying soldiers, etc.;
- Improve processes for free and fair elections;
- Heavily increase focus and work towards disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement, and reintegration;
- Complex peacekeeping deal with neighbors (mainly Rwanda and Uganda);
- Improve state government ability to project power in the east - including judicial oversight;
- Economic development;
- Comprehensive infrastructure improvement plan, especially roads that can facilitate the quicker transportation of FARDC security forces, humanitarian aid, and transportation to safer areas;
- Rebuild destroyed communities;
- Environmental protection plans to ensure long-term sustainability of areas.

**10. Other priority issues/concerns and situations that warrant the attention of the Special Rapporteur in view of her mandate:**

- The importance of eliminating the threat posed by ADF, especially the direct targeting of Christians in the region.
- The importance of the DRC to the United States' strategic security and energy goals in the region and how it may help.
- The importance of agencies to project soft power and push back against Chinese exploitation of resources, influence and funding.

