

## Urgent Call to Action:

### With the fall of Goma, the EU must take responsibility in restoring peace and stability in the Great Lakes

Following the successive captures of the towns of Minova and Sake, the M23 rebels and the Rwandan army have taken control of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. These past developments not only constitute another brutal violation of the territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), but also further compromise regional stability, with potentially dramatic consequences for civilian populations.

With the capture of the town of Goma, the population has once again fallen victim to a downward spiral of violence. Over 400,000 people have fled the fighting in the last three weeks, adding to the 650,000 already displaced persons on the outskirts of the city<sup>1</sup>. Among the influx of wounded civilians, stands out the high number of women and girls, who are further exposed to sexual violence. Their cases are already being documented by United Nations (UN) agencies<sup>2</sup>. The situation is further aggravated by the danger faced by separated or unaccompanied children, who find themselves in immensely vulnerable situations.

The civilian population is facing an extremely serious humanitarian situation, which is rapidly deteriorating. Water and electricity supplies have been cut off, preventing locals from communicating with the rest of the country. The significant risk of a health crisis is exacerbated by attacks on hospitals, already overburdened by the influx of wounded civilians.<sup>3</sup>

The isolation of Goma and the surrounding area is further restricting access to humanitarian aid and the provision of services both within the city and in the IDP camps. The distribution of food aid, the last line of defence against shortages, has been temporarily suspended<sup>4</sup>. The destruction of the means of communication complicates the access of citizens to information disseminated by national authorities and leads to an increase in misinformation, feeding into an increasing atmosphere of fear, insecurity and despair.

Faced with this situation, **the Europe-Central Africa Network (EurAc) fears serious and systematic human rights violations and is particularly concerned with journalists, human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society as a whole, whose safety must be guaranteed.**

In this alarming context, the response of the international community remains limited and not concrete enough, despite repeated alerts from local and international civil society.

### The failure of European diplomacy in the face of crisis

Through our prism, the passive management of the conflict and “*business as usual*” approach has proved ineffective over time. This has led to fuelling the escalation of regional tensions and helped perpetuate patterns of aggression that have become chronic in the region. As a result,

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<sup>1</sup> [RDC : 3 questions sur l'intensification du conflit armé au Nord et au Sud-Kivu](#), MSF, 29 janvier 2025

<sup>2</sup> [DR Congo emergency: next 24 hours are critical, warn UN agencies](#), UN News, 28 January 2025

<sup>3</sup> [MSF appeals for humanitarian access in Goma as casualties seek medical care](#), MSF, 29 janvier 2025

<sup>4</sup> [DR Congo emergency: next 24 hours are critical, warn UN agencies](#), UN News, 28 January 2025

Congolese trust in the legitimacy and integrity of their European and international partners has been considerably weakened.

Numerous local NGOs and civil groups have expressed their disappointment at the inaction of the international community, which has been described as “*hypocritical*” for its inability to implement concrete measures to punish the perpetrators of violations of international law and international humanitarian law.

### A European Union non-receptive of civil society’s repeated appeals

Over the past few years, civil society actors and UN experts have constantly alerted the EU and the international community of the deteriorating security situation in the DRC. As a network, working closely with local partners in the region, EurAc has continually addressed key decision-makers in the EU and its member states on the growing fragility of the situation in eastern DRC, highlighting the risk of a regional spillover of the conflict<sup>5</sup>.

Our analysis of the context has identified serious inconsistencies in EU policies that have sent ambiguous signals to countries in the region. One such example is the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and Rwanda on minerals in 2024, when the country was already pointed out for its active support of the M23 on the territory of its Congolese neighbour, and minerals mined in North Kivu were illegally transiting through Rwanda<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, in the same year, under the European Peace Facility (EPF), the EU allocated additional funds to Rwanda despite its proven track support for the M23, to help its deployment in Mozambique<sup>7</sup>. Guarantees of traceability of these funds, their use and final beneficiaries were deemed unadapted. These political acts have contributed to fuelling already existing tensions in the region, suggesting that further violations of international law by Rwanda could remain on the horizon.

**In the eyes of our partners in the Great Lakes region, this succession of incoherent political decisions makes the EU complicit in the recent developments that have led to the current crisis in eastern DRC.** The EU, its member states and the rest of the international community must continue to strongly condemn any Rwandan support for the actions of the M23 and must also implement concrete measures in favour of a lasting resolution to the conflict.

### Recommendations for European Union decision-makers

#### I. Ceasefire and humanitarian aid

In this fragile context, and given the urgency of the humanitarian and security situation in eastern DRC, EurAc calls on the European Union and its member states to take the following measures as a matter of urgency:

- 1) Prioritize the immediate and unhindered protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure in accordance with international law. To this end, international organizations working with Congolese civil society must be guaranteed immediate and lasting access to areas occupied by the M23.

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<sup>5</sup> [Conflit au Nord-Kivu : l’UE doit cesser toute coopération militaire avec le Rwanda](#), EurAc, EurAc, 26 mars 2024

<sup>6</sup> [Note d’analyse sur la signature d’un protocole d’accord sur les minerais stratégiques entre l’UE et le Rwanda](#), EurAc, 30 mai 2024

<sup>7</sup> [Communiqué du réseau EurAc en réaction à l’annonce d’un nouveau soutien financier au Rwanda dans le cadre de la Facilité Européenne pour la Paix \(FEP\)](#), EurAc, 21 novembre 2025

- 2) Guarantee the establishment of humanitarian corridors to facilitate the immediate, massive and unimpeded delivery of emergency aid to meet the urgent of the population in Goma and its surrounding areas, with particular attention paid to people displaced by the conflict and incorporating a gender-sensitive approach.
- 3) Demand and support the establishment of protection mechanisms for human rights defenders (HRDs) and all civil society actors in North Kivu, irrespective of their domain. It is imperative to demand the preservation of their right to freedom of association and action.
- 4) Take collective action to re-establish political dialogue with all parties to the conflict and impose mediation at the negotiating table in line with the Luanda and Nairobi processes. Guarantee an inclusive peace process with the participation of civil society in all its diversity.

## **II. Application of sanctions**

The current situation calls for the application of concrete and appropriate sanctions against Rwanda until the complete and verifiable withdrawal of its troops from the eastern DRC and its support for the armed conflict. More concretely, EurAc calls for:

- 1) The withdrawal of the EU from the EU-Rwanda Memorandum of Understanding on minerals.
- 2) The cessation of all military cooperation with Rwanda, including funding allocated to the country under the European Peace Facility (EPF) to ensure that aid is not used to reinforce military operations in the DRC.
- 3) The revision and conditioning of financial cooperation instruments allocated to Rwanda for the current period. The evolution of the security context must be a decisive criterion in the negotiations for the next Multi-Year Indicative Programming (MIP).
- 4) The urgent update of the list of targeted sanctions for those involved in serious human rights violations and war crimes in the light of recent events, with particular attention to conflict-related sexual violence.