



## Expert Meeting on the Humanitarian Crisis in Eastern DRC (part 2)

Thursday 8 May 2025 | 15:00 - 16:30 CEST | ZOOM

### *Summary report*

*This report was written based on the discussion taking place at the time of the meeting and has not been updated to include developments and events that have occurred since then.*

On March 6, 2025, KUNO organised an expert meeting about Eastern Congo. During this meeting, the humanitarian crisis and the various layers behind the escalated conflict following the M23 offensive were extensively discussed.<sup>1</sup> The humanitarian toll of the conflict is immense: thousands of people are deprived of life-saving aid, gender-based violence has surged, and four million people are estimated to be displaced in North and South Kivu.

### Speakers

- **Lucas Bredal**, Regional Analyst in DRC, International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO),
- **Representative of a Congolese NGO**
- **Justine Masika**, Coordinator, Synergie des Femmes pour les Victimes des Violences Sexuelles (SFVS)

KUNO organised this follow-up meeting in order to take stock of the challenges in responding to the humanitarian needs in the region. This expert meeting was moderated by **Kiza Magendane**, an Independent Writer, Political Scientist, and Social Entrepreneur.

**Lucas Bredal**, began by providing an overview of the impact of the current situation on NGO's safety and security. In 2025, M23 rapidly gained control over major areas and cities in the Eastern DRC, with territory being taken at an unprecedented speed. The rapid expansion has shifted local conflict dynamics and increased insecurity. Anticipating risk in this context is difficult due to the uncertainty about where attacks can occur on a daily or even weekly basis. In addition, the humanitarian environment is highly complex, with a dramatic increase in humanitarian incidents in 2025 compared to previous conflict years. In North and South Kivu, killings have increased by approximately 60%, and arrests by 25%, compared to the total annual average of the past three years. These

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<sup>1</sup> The summary report of this meeting can be found [here](#).

arrests are mostly occurring in border areas when crossing between areas of differing territorial control. These facts reflect an increased scrutiny and erosion of trust towards humanitarians by all parties. As a result, the pressure on humanitarians is mounting through administrative demands, double taxation, and a shrinking operational space.

A representative of the national NGO discussed the impact of the current situation on Congolese organisations and how they strive to adapt their operations to address current needs. The M23 offensive has heavily impacted civilians and humanitarian organisations. The fighting in Goma and Bukavu has destroyed the social and economic foundations of the cities. Houses have been systematically destroyed, humanitarian warehouses have been looted, and displacement camps around Goma have been dismantled. These displaced people are required to immediately return to their communities of origin without any humanitarian assistance. In addition, the airports of Goma and Kavumu and many banks have been closed due to the fighting.

This has heavily impacted national and international organisations operating in North and South Kivu in numerous ways. Firstly, humanitarian interventions have been suspended or stopped in the displacement camps around Goma, which has caused losses of equipment, supplies, and installations used in the camps. Secondly, humanitarian aid is unable to reach organisations due to the closing of the airports, and the closing of banks has left organisations without access to their financial accounts. Advocacy is needed involving local, national and international organisations for the reopening of these facilities. Thirdly, the evacuation of international staff and closure of INGO offices have weakened activities which were carried out in partnership with local organisations. With the unprepared return of approximately 700.000 internally displaced persons, humanitarian needs are too numerous compared to the available response. In order to meet these challenges and needs, national organisations are carrying out multi-sectoral assessments to find out which needs should be prioritised. With the closure of the banks, the humanitarian organisations are relying on the banks operating in the closest territories under the control of the Kinshasa government. This is the case in Beni territory in North Kivu and in Bunia in Ituri province. The organisations use bank agents to transfer money, or ask suppliers to open accounts at the same banks so that they can be paid via transfer orders.

Concerted advocacy actions involving all players at local, national and international level are required to ensure the rapid and urgent opening of airports (Goma and Kavumu), banks and the release of American humanitarian aid via USAID to save lives in the grip of misery; Another recommendation is that national and local INGOs and other actors mobilise to plead in favour of maintaining the Netherlands' Grand Lac Regional Programme for Stability in Eastern DRC.

Last of the speakers, **Justine Masika** discussed the impact of the conflict on women and the role of women in making a difference. People are living in a permanent state of fear, for themselves and for their children. This war has caused a rise in violence against women and girls- every four minutes a woman is raped in Eastern DRC. The humanitarian context in this region is extremely dire, which complicates the work of humanitarian organisations. In addition to the gender-based violence, women are disproportionately affected by the conflict in other ways as well. The collapse of health and sanitation facilities has severely impacted their well-being. Many women also depend on loans and credit from banks to meet basic needs, but with the closure of these financial institutions, access has been cut off.

At the same time, women are taking an active part in peace negotiations. In all of these years of conflict in Eastern DRC, women have played an essential role in communities. Still, these women are often put to the side during peace negotiations. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 reaffirms the important role of women in peace negotiations - not just as observers, but as active participants. However, this has not been implemented well in practice. Organisations working for women's rights have often been minimised. It is important to support these organisations, considering the heavy price that women pay during conflict.

### **Discussion and reflection**

The audience expressed concern about achieving peace in the Eastern DRC through the ongoing ceasefire negotiations, and also sustaining peace in the region by preventing the spread of the conflict to other countries. The situation is not entirely hopeful, as previous agreements - such as the Rwanda Process - and unilateral declarations have continuously been broken. However, the increased international attention by Qatar and the United States might increase the chance of a more reliable ceasefire agreement. Each of the actors in the war aims to defend and further their own interests. Therefore, an important role for the humanitarian sector is to strengthen social cohesion.

The unprepared return of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons is of high concern. For two years, displaced people lived in camps around Goma and are now forced to return to their communities of origin without any preparation or assistance. Many were not able to return to their former homes, because they were destroyed and there were not enough resources present to be able to sustain their lives. Humanitarian organisations have limited resources to help these people. Some local organisations have started livelihood programmes, such as soap-making workshops, in order to provide people with essential goods and to enable them to make money. Through multi-sectoral assessments, it has been found that there is a need for measures to aid farmers, and for financial support in order to make communities more resilient. In addition, children need to be reintegrated into schools.

Following this, it was questioned how to re-open the airports and banks in Eastern DRC in order to sustain humanitarian operations. Currently, some organisations are relying on mobile transfers to transfer funds to Goma. However, the government has expressed wanting to stop these services, which would worsen the liquidity crisis. In addition, transferring funds from neighbouring countries to the DRC is paired with high exchange rates. The reopening of banks is a complicated matter as it risks financing M23 and other rebel groups. If they are reopened, it is possible that rebel groups could organise a coup to gain control of the banks to further fund their actions. Therefore, it is essential to engage with both stakeholders when negotiating the reopening of the banks. Similar problems have arisen with the closure of airports; humanitarian organisations have not been able to access their stock after Goma was taken on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January.