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## **UN Peacekeepers Deployed to Congo's North Kivu Province**

by Peter Clotey

A spokesman for the United Nations Mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) said the world body has deployed peacekeepers to Masisi and Rutshuru to protect unarmed civilians.

Alexander Essome, MONUSCO's regional spokesman, said his organization continues to investigate reports of insecurity in Katoyi and Remeka following recent conflicts, after local militia groups reportedly killed scores of Kinyarwanda-speaking (spoken language in Rwanda) civilians in the region, as well as retaliatory attacks by the pro-Hutu militia group Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

Observers say unarmed civilians often bear the brunt of the FDLR's retaliatory attacks. MONUSCO said about 98 people have been killed as a result of the clashes between rival militia groups.

"We decided that, given the danger in the area, we are going to deploy what we call a temporary military deployment in those areas. So, we deployed three [groups of peacekeepers] in that area to protect [the] local population," said Essome.

According to humanitarian agencies, growing insecurity in the restive North Kivu province has increased the number of internally displaced people to 218,000 over the past two months.

Essome said MONUSCO is working with the national army (FARDC) to help protect civilians from armed attacks from rebels.

"We approached FARDC and we advised the FARDC to also deploy in that area. They have deployed what we call 810-regiment in that area to ensure that the population is protected. Of course, we do support that particular regiment deployed in the area," Essome said.

He said the increased security has sharply reduced attacks by armed groups in the area.

"Ever since we deployed there, we have never heard of a lot of killings except the one that happened about 10 days ago, where it was reported to us that 10 people were killed following Ria Mutumbuki attacks. Of course, we deployed another team to investigate. We are still investigating," said Essome.

Residents in Rutshuru in North Kivu province have recently reported a spike in violent attacks by armed groups. Essome said MONUSCO has increased security in the region following the reports.

"In the Rutshuru area, we have an extensive deployment in some villages like Kibumba, Kabaya, Bunagana, and Rubare, among others. All these areas are secure right now and we ensure that the population is not displaced from where they are," said Essome.

The UN Security Council tasked MONUSCO with protecting unarmed civilians from attacks from insurgent rebel groups in the country.