

**Congo-Kinshasa: Fears of War With Rwanda Rattle DRC Youth**  
**By Passy Mubalama, Goma**  
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Recent Human Rights Watch and UN reports have denounced Rwanda's support of rebels and army deserters in North Kivu. Many young Goma residents believe the reports, though they're divided on just what their country should or should not do in response.

According to Human Rights Watch, Rwandan military officials enlisted - sometimes forcefully - 200 to 300 Rwandans to support Bosco Ntaganda's rebellion in the Rutshuru region. Ntaganda, who is wanted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court, is an ex-military commander of the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP).

This former Tutsi-dominated rebel group was integrated into the Congolese army following a 2009 peace agreement. The rebels demand its full implementation; in fact, their movement was named M23, for 23 March, the date the pact was signed.

"We were shocked to learn that the Rwandan government was supporting the rebellion in the DRC," says Grace Alika Zigabe, a student and human rights activist. "It's very sad, especially after the successive conflicts that have plagued not only the DRC, but the entire Great Lakes region.

I am talking about the genocide in Rwanda, the civil war in Burundi and the succession of conflicts in the DRC in 1996, 1998 and 2006. Those are times we cannot forget. Today, it is disappointing to find ourselves in the same situation."

Government criticism

After the Rwandan support of the rebellion was denounced by the UN and then by HRW, the Congolese government turned to criticize Kigali. The Rwandan capital was accused of being passive in the face of grave violations of peace and security.

"One thing is certain," said Congolese government spokesperson Lambert Mende at a press conference on 9 June in Goma. "Rwanda served as a base for the preparation of a conspiracy, which started with a mutiny and is dangerously leading to the collapse of peace between two countries in the Great Lakes region."

Rwandan authorities have denied all the allegations.

What say the youth?

Congolese youth remain divided on the issue. "We anxiously await the results of ongoing investigations," says Zigabe. "But I think a war in the DRC is not in the Rwandan government's interest because the Rutshuru region is close to the Rwandan border.

A conflict in the DRC could easily spill over to Rwanda."

According to HRW, the M23 rebels' ties to Rwanda were exposed as part of ongoing probes into the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), who were suspected of being involved in the 1994 mass killing of Tutsis.

Many young Goma residents are convinced by the HRW report, which they believe could harm already fragile relations between the DRC and Rwanda. To some, Kigali simply wants to take over the North Kivu province.

"Controlling the eastern part of the DRC has always been one of Rwanda's goals and we, the populations of this region, are the first victims. There are slowly working towards that objective," says Augustin Lukubushi Ntakobajira, a student.

He is not the only one suspicious of the neighbouring nation's geopolitical ambitions. "North Kivu will never become part of Rwanda. If Rwandans think that by supporting war in the DRC, they will be able to take our resources, our minerals... they have another thing coming," says Patrick Mundenke, another young resident of Goma.

Another youth chimes in, saying: "I believe that Rwanda wants to annex part of the Congolese territory. That is the reason behind all the aggression, insecurity and rebellion that we experience here in North Kivu. Otherwise, why is it that whenever there is a conflict in the DRC, Rwanda is somehow involved?"

#### To negotiate or not?

At a time when the two countries should be seeking solutions to preserve cross-border peace, Lambert Mende, speaking on behalf of the Congolese authorities, declared that "the Congolese government would not negotiate with the rebels".

This position, in particular, is widely criticized among youth in Goma. "Refusing to negotiate with the rebels is a mistake. What's the cost of negotiating with rebels compared to the civilian populations dying because of the war? I think they should negotiate because displaced people need to return to a normal life," says Zigabe. "We presently do not have a unified national army. Our army is a product of drafts and integrations and, as a result, we cannot have a very coherent military strategy."

As far as Mundeke is concerned, the Congolese government has demonstrated wisdom in handling the matter. "The government waited and conducted investigations; they dug into the issue to find the truth on the situation."

According to him, the best solution must be a diplomatic one. However, he does not exclude military war. "Our government should opt for negotiations, but at the same time prepare the FARDC - the Congolese armed forces - for any other scenario."