

Fighting prompts UN intervention in DR Congo

By Aljazeera

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The M23 movement demand the full implementation of the March 2009 peace deal after which they are named [AFP]

United Nations helicopters have fired on rebel positions in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo after new clashes broke out between rebel fighters and loyalist troops, officials have said.

Tuesday's airborne action followed renewed clashes that broke out between M23 rebel fighters and loyalist troops, north of the regional capital Goma.

The second such UN action against rebels came in response to a rebel offensive "against the civilian population", Mamodj Munubai, a spokesman for MONUSCO, the UN mission in DR Congo, said on Tuesday.

Major Olivier Hamuli, the army spokesman for Nord Kivu province, said fighting erupted after rebels attacked army positions around Rugari and Kimumba, about 30 kilometres north of Goma.

But Colonel Vianney Kazarama, a spokesman for the M23, blamed the army for the firing: "From our side, we're calm. Nothing to report."

The DR Congo's army was not immediately available for comment.

Forced displacements

"We were in our house and we heard gunfire and then saw the soldiers running. When we saw the soldiers running, we also fled as we were scared."

- Isidore Kambale, resident

No casualty figures were immediately available but Munubai said about 2,000 residents were forced to flee the region.

Al Jazeera's correspondent Peter Greste, reporting from Nairobi, said "people could be seen fleeing, carrying their belongings on their heads".

"We were in our house and we heard gunfire and then saw the soldiers running. When we saw the soldiers running, we also fled as we were scared," Isidore Kambale, a resident of Rugari, told the Reuters news agency as he took to the main road south.

A rebellion launched in April has already forced some 260,000 people to flee their homes. UN experts have said neighbouring Rwanda is backing the rebels, prompting the United States, a key ally of Kigali's, to cut some military aid.

Rwanda denies it is supporting the rebels.

Intervention

Leaders from Africa's Great Lakes region plan to send a "neutral force" to Congo to end cycles of violence, though no details have yet emerged on where the troops will come from or when they will be deployed.

"We'll be discussing a range of ideas aimed at finding a solution to the crisis including a temporary ceasefire and a stationing a permanent international stabilisation force along DRC's border with Rwanda," Asuman Kiyingi, Uganda's acting foreign minister, said.

UN peacekeepers have previously fired on rebel positions in support of government troops. On July 12, UN helicopters were deployed to stop a rebel advance on Goma. They have also reinforced positions around Goma in a bid to make sure the rebels, known as the M23, cannot threaten the town.

The mutineers are Tutsi ex-rebels who were integrated into the regular army in 2009 as part of a peace deal that followed their failed 2008 offensive on Goma.

They mutinied in April, demanding better pay and the full implementation of the March 23, 2009 peace deal after which they are named.

Source: AL Jazeera and Agencies