

Joint Statement

AU Summit: INGOs Call on AU Leaders to Prioritize Finding Lasting Solutions to Deteriorating Conflict and Humanitarian Crisis in DRC

11 February 2025. As African Leaders meet in Addis Ababa for the African Union (AU) Summit this week, all efforts should be deployed to address the long lasting and deteriorating crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where millions of people are trapped in an endless cycle of violence, displacement and humanitarian needs.

The ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in the DRC reached an even more devastating turning point as the M23 armed group captured Goma, the largest city in the eastern region of the country, and a key humanitarian hub. Eastern DRC has been embroiled in conflict for decades, but the capture of Goma marks a significant and dangerous shift, raising concerns about a regionalization of the conflict.

The weeks of escalating violence in North and South Kivu that led to the capture of Goma and other towns in these districts were devastating for populations, many of them already displaced several times by previous episodes of violence. Indiscriminate attacks against civilian areas and infrastructure including IDP sites, had already displaced over 400,000 people in the first three weeks of January. This number is likely to have skyrocketed in the past few days. Reports show that several displacement sites, including on the outskirts of Goma, have been looted or destroyed by armed groups forcing people to leave, while others were entirely emptied as families fled the fighting. The escalation of violence toward Bukavu now raises fears of even greater displacement that will trigger new levels of urgent needs as the humanitarian response is at a standstill.

In Goma, several days of intense fighting are estimated to have killed about [3,000 people](#) and injured many more. Emerging [reports](#) of Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) paint a grim picture of the situation of women and girls in this crisis. The town now faces staggering humanitarian needs amidst extremely limited humanitarian response capacity. Key infrastructure and supply routes were destroyed or cut off, as well as electricity, internet and water supplies, restricting people's access to essential services. Banks are still closed, meaning people cannot access cash, and hospitals are overcrowded, with critical shortages of medical supplies and staff.

The international response to the crisis has been insufficient, despite the scale of the needs. Humanitarian organizations are ready to provide assistance, but the volatility of the security situation and operational constraints such as restricted access are major obstacles. If the violence continues unchecked, this crisis will spiral further out of control. Beyond this latest development in Goma, the situation in the DRC, especially in the East, has been catastrophic for populations for years and demands increased levels of attention and support from regional and international actors.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict and improve humanitarian access have yielded limited success so far. While peace talks, such as those facilitated by regional bodies like the East African Community (EAC), and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) have been initiated, they have yet to produce a lasting solution. Limited advancement in brokering peace through previous peace processes, such as the Nairobi process and Luanda talks, highlights the complexity of the situation and the urgent need for stronger

regional cooperation to bring an end to the violence. The renewed commitment from EAC and SADC leaders to address the crisis demonstrated in their recent [Joint Summit and Communiqué](#) on the DRC is welcome, but will require continued and intensified political will at the highest levels in order to yield concrete results. Without this, the humanitarian and security situation in eastern DRC will continue to worsen, with long-lasting effects on the stability of the Great Lakes region. The last Congo War, also known as Africa's World War, which began in 1998, drew in nine nations and caused the death of over 5 million people. This makes finding a peaceful solution not only crucial for the DRC and its population but for the entire region's stability. The AU and its Member States, as well as the broader international community, must work together to prevent the conflict from spilling over and creating a wider crisis.

Building on the commitments and recommendations made at the EAC-SADC Joint Summit on 8 February, urgent and coordinated action needs to continue at the AU Summit and beyond.

The African Union and its Member States should:

1. Hold an emergency meeting on the situation in eastern DRC at Head of State and Government level in the margins of the AU Assembly and **adopt a joint statement reiterating all commitments and recommendations expressed in the AU Peace and Security Council and EAC-SADC Joint Summit Communiqués dated 28 January 2025 and 8 February 2025 respectively, especially calling on all parties to the conflict to:**
 - a. Immediately cease hostilities and engage in dialogue to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict.
 - b. Facilitate safe and unhindered access to humanitarian aid and basic services for populations in need wherever they live, including by re-opening the Goma airport and finding alternative solutions for imports, establishing secure corridors for aid, removing bureaucratic barriers to aid delivery, and providing protection guarantees for humanitarian workers.
 - c. Take all necessary measures to protect civilians and the infrastructure they depend on for survival, prioritizing the protection and well-being of displaced persons, particularly women and children, especially by ensuring that IDP camps and sites are protected, in line with International Humanitarian Law.
2. **Strengthen regional diplomacy to bring the conflict parties and their backers back to the negotiating table by** building on and increasing resources for the facilitation of the existing Nairobi and Luanda processes, now merged into the Luanda/Nairobi process, adapting it to the realities of the ongoing conflict, and focusing on halting the fighting in eastern DRC and ensuring all parties adhere to previous ceasefire agreements.
3. **Mobilize increased AU Member States and broader international support to address the humanitarian crisis by calling for an International Pledging Conference for the DRC** in the first quarter of 2025.

The Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) is a regional coordination and advocacy platform of NGOs working in East and Central Africa.

The FONGA (Forum des ONG en Afrique de l'Ouest et Centrale) is a regional coordination platform of NGOs working in West and Central Africa.