



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON
SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, condemns the renewed offensive by the M23 with the support of the Rwandan Defence Force and expresses grave concern about the heightened risk and emerging reports of conflict-related sexual violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

Press Release: For Immediate Release

New York, 3 February 2025: The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, expresses grave concerns over the attacks in Goma, North Kivu and South Kivu, by the Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23) with the support of the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF), which intensified on 23 January 2025. This renewed offensive with its current expansion to South Kivu has triggered an alarming deterioration of the security situation, with reports of attacks against civilians, including conflict-related sexual violence. “These brutal attacks are a horrific reminder of the extreme vulnerability of civilians caught amid armed conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and must cease immediately. All perpetrators of such acts must be held to account for their crimes.”

Special Representative Patten noted the devastating impact of the escalating hostilities on civilians, with the displacement of almost 500,000 people in January 2025 alone, in addition to the 6.4 million persons already displaced in 2024. Civilians, especially women and girls are being exposed to heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence. On January 27, as prisoners escaped from Muzenze prison in Goma, at least 165 women were reportedly raped. Despite the acute insecurity, in addition to challenges in accessing necessary services, multiple reports of conflict-related sexual violence including rape, gang rape and sexual slavery, perpetrated by all parties to the conflict, continue to emerge. “I am deeply concerned about alarming reports of an increase in rape along the pathways of the parties to the conflict in South Kivu, with reports of women being raped multiple times”, noted Special Representative Patten. SRSG Patten urges all warring parties to abide by their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law. This includes taking all necessary steps to protect civilians, particularly displaced women and children and survivors of sexual violence. “I further call on the Government of the DRC to ensure access to justice for all victims of conflict-related sexual violence.”

SRSG Patten condemns the looting of warehouses and attacks against the humanitarian and health facilities of UN agencies and other humanitarian actors, especially the looting of medical supplies. Constrained humanitarian access and limited resources for service providers will reduce the availability of essential health care and assistance for survivors of sexual violence. Access to medical assistance, including post-rape kits, treatment to prevent HIV and STI transmission and psychosocial support are critical. SRSG Patten urged all parties to safeguard and ensure unrestricted access to healthcare facilities, in full compliance with international

humanitarian law, ensuring that survivors of sexual violence have access to comprehensive multisectoral services.

The Special Representative echoed the call of the Secretary-General, for the M23 and the Rwandan troops to immediately cease its military offensive, withdraw from all occupied areas and abide by the 31 July 2024 ceasefire agreement. She further urged the parties to return to diplomatic talks through the Luanda and Nairobi peace processes and comply with relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence including 1888 (2009), 2106 (2013) and 2467 (2019). She urged refugee-receiving countries in the region to provide assistance and protection to civilians, including for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. The Special Representative condemned the attacks against United Nations peacekeepers that led to the death of three blue helmets during the recent M23 offensive.

“I urge the international community to sustain its financial support to the ongoing humanitarian efforts, including concrete measures to meet the needs of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, to support women human rights defenders and accountability efforts, and to use all political and diplomatic tools to put an end to this violence,” the Special Representative added.

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