News
Ministry



Congolese people displaced by recent clashes between the M23 rebels and the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo prepare to leave a camp Feb. 12, 2025, and return home after being instructed by the M23 rebels to vacate camps on the outskirts of Goma, Congo. (OSV News/Reuters)



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Goma, Congo — March 6, 2025

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In one of the rooms of the convent near the Signers roundabout, nearly a dozen religious sisters are still trembling, taking short breaths, and feeling traumatized.

They are tense and anxious, weeks after the March 23 Movement, or M23, fighters captured Goma city following heavy battles with Congolese government forces that erupted in late January.

"The gunfire was intense, and we narrowly escaped death," recounted an Ursuline Sister of Tildonk. She is a missionary in Goma, where she supports women and children who have been left as widows and orphans due to the ongoing wars in their country.

"We were filled with fear and deep trauma," she grieved, requesting that Global Sisters Report safeguard her identity for her protection. "We lost our appetite, suffered from diarrhea caused by fear, and trembled a lot."

"Until today we are still afraid and dread even the slightest noise. We are relying on prayers and urge everyone to pray for us."

The recent fighting, a significant escalation of a decadelong conflict, resulted in nearly 3,000 deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. The most powerful among more than 100 armed groups, M23 also captured Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province, last week after advancing south following their capture of Goma, the capital of North Kivu. According to United Nations experts, the M23 is supported by approximately 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda.



Congolese Red Cross members bury body bags in a mass grave at Musigoko cemetery in Bukavu, Congo, Feb. 20, 2025. The bags contained the remains of victims killed in recent clashes between M23 rebels and the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. (OSV News/Reuters/Victoire Mukenge)

The government of Democratic Republic of Congo, led by Prime Minister Judith Suminwa, estimates that approximately 7,000 people have been killed in the ongoing conflict. Meanwhile, Rwanda has consistently denied any involvement in supporting the M23 rebels, who are noted to be well-equipped, well-armed and well-trained.

M23, a rebel group composed primarily of Tutsis, claims that it is fighting to protect both Tutsis and Congolese people of Rwandan origin from discrimination. The group have expressed intentions to march to the capital, Kinshasa, in an effort to unseat President Félix Tshisekedi's government. However, analysts suggest that the militia's true objective is to gain control of the country's mineral resources, including gold, tin, tantalum and tungsten.

Religious sisters recounted their experiences of how they risked their lives and narrowly escaped death as two factions clashed over control of territories and mineral resources.

A visibly shaken nun, who requested anonymity for safety reasons, recounted to GSR how she escaped death during a three-day ordeal filled with relentless bombings and gunfire involving both heavy and light weaponry.

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"A bullet passed through the iron sheets and the ceiling, falling to the ground very close to my leg," she recounted in a low, deep voice filled with pain. "Another bullet went through the wall and nearly hit me while I was moving from my bedroom to the sitting room."

"I thank God for my survival," she said, pledging, "I don't want to leave Goma now. I wish to help those suffering from the ongoing war."

At the Charité Maternelle General Hospital in Goma, a sister working as a nurse explained that she and the other 11 sisters survived an attack when rebels and the army fought on their premises.

She revealed that amid the chaos of battle, artillery shells directly struck the maternity ward of her hospital, leading to a tragic loss of life and injury among innocent civilians, including vulnerable newborns and pregnant women.

She emphasized that it is crucial for the international community to intervene and support the health care sector. This assistance, she stated, would enable them to continue providing care for those injured during the war.

"While we hope for lasting peace in our country, especially in the city of Goma, we urgently need assistance to rebuild our health care infrastructure, which has been severely impacted by the war," said the sister, who is also a member of the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption.



Bishop Willy Ngumbi Ngengele of Goma, in vestments, and other representatives from Congo's Catholic Church address the media outside the Serena Hotel in Goma Feb. 12, 2025. The media briefing followed a meeting with a rebel leader after the Rwandan-backed M23 rebels seized Goma in late January. (OSV News/Reuters/Fiston Mahamba)

Another nun, who works as a clinical psychologist at Caritas of Goma, spoke to GSR about the psychological toll the ongoing war takes on religious sisters in the area. She revealed that many sisters are experiencing stress and trauma due to the horrific events they witnessed during the intense fighting for control of Goma.

She explained that the sisters narrowly escaped death, and after the situation calmed, they were confronted with the sight of dead bodies lying in the streets and thousands of wounded individuals who needed assistance. For many sisters, she said, these experiences were unprecedented, and they find it deeply disturbing to witness how lives can be lost in such a tragic manner.

"I provide comfort and counseling to sisters and residents who are experiencing trauma due to the war," she said, requesting to remain anonymous for security reasons. "Despite the ongoing conflict, I continue to go to work to listen to and support those who are deeply affected by these events."

Most of the sisters working in eastern Congo have committed to staying in the region, as they want to continue serving those suffering from the effects of the war.

"I am Congolese and, honestly, I do not dream of leaving my country at the moment because living in exile is not easy. I want to stay here to serve my people and help heal their souls, bodies and spirits," said a clinical psychologist.

"Even in the face of fear and trauma, we remain committed to serving our community," said the Ursuline sister. "We humbly ask for your prayers and support to help us continue this important work."