

UN to send more troops to DR Congo

By [Global Research](#)

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The UN Security Council has voted to send about 3,000 additional peacekeepers to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to help prevent a new war in the country's east.

The vote was passed unanimously on Thursday, as reports of clashes between Tutsi rebels and pro-government fighters threatened a ceasefire deal that has seen hundreds of rebels pull back from frontline positions.

The AFP news agency quoted an unnamed security source as saying that fighting had broken out at the villages of Katoro and Nyongera, near Kiwanja in North Kivu province.

The UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC, known as Monuc, is the UN's biggest and the reinforcements will bring it to just over 20,000 troops and police.

But the mission has been criticised by Aid organisations for allowing a humanitarian disaster to develop.

John Sawers, the UK's ambassador to the UN, told Al Jazeera that the new UN force would be deployed as fast as possible.

"Certainly, we will want to help countries that are ready to deploy, we want to try to assist them as best we can in getting troops on the ground rapidly," he said.

"It's important that there's a Monuc peacekeeping force with the capacity to oversee the implementation of a political framework. How long it will be, we're not sure, but this is a matter of urgency."

Unconfirmed clashes

Fighters with government-backed Mai-Mai forces have accused UN peacekeepers of fighting alongside the Tutsi rebels loyal to Laurent Nkunda, a renegade DRC army general.

"Monuc fired on our forces, they found themselves in difficulty called for help to the CNDP ... it is a CNDP/Monuc coalition against the Mai-Mai," said Didier Bitaki, a Mai-Mai spokesman, referring to Nkunda's National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP).

"The CNDP are trying to dislodge us from Katoro."

Lieutenant Colonel Jean-Paul Dietrich, a spokesman for Monuc, could not immediately confirm or deny the report.

Ethnic tensions

On Wednesday, Monuc peacekeepers opened fire on Mai-Mai fighters in the region after two of their armoured cars came under fire from them while on patrol.

Bertrand Bisimwa, a spokesman for Nkunda's CNDP, said the use of heavy weapons in the fighting meant that government troops and Rwandan Hutu rebels were involved in the fighting, adding that the Hutu force was fighting alongside the government soldiers.

"They tried to advance on our positions at around 6.30 am (04:30 GMT) to take Kiwanja," said Bisimwa.

Nkunda has repeatedly accused the government of backing the Rwanda Hutu fighters, some of whom - according to Rwanda - took part in the 1994 genocide of Tutsis in their country.

Rebel withdrawal

The latest reports of fighting come a day after hundreds of Tutsi fighters pulled back from the frontline, a move welcomed by the UN as a step toward brokering peace in the DRC's North Kivu region.

UN foot and air patrols monitored the rebels' withdrawal.

Amid the ceasefire, aid workers scrambled to reach more of the 300,000 hungry, exhausted refugees displaced by the fighting.

Romain Gitenet, a field coordinator for Medicine San Frontiere based in Nairobi, told Al Jazeera the situation was "critical".

"Families are separated, when there is fighting there is panic and they escape," he said.

"People are exposed to the rainy season, they are in the forest, they are in the bush and the lucky ones are in the camps."

Angola meeting

The rebel pullback has raised hopes for peace talks that could end the violence in eastern Congo.

Joseph Kabila, the Congolese president, has said he will discuss the conflict in his country with Angola's president on Friday.

The DRC recently asked Angola for political and military support to tackle the advance of Nkunda's forces, but the Angolan government, which has one of sub-Saharan Africa's biggest armies, has repeatedly said it will not interfere directly in the conflict.

The Angolan military backed the Congolese government in the DRC's 1998-2003 war.

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