

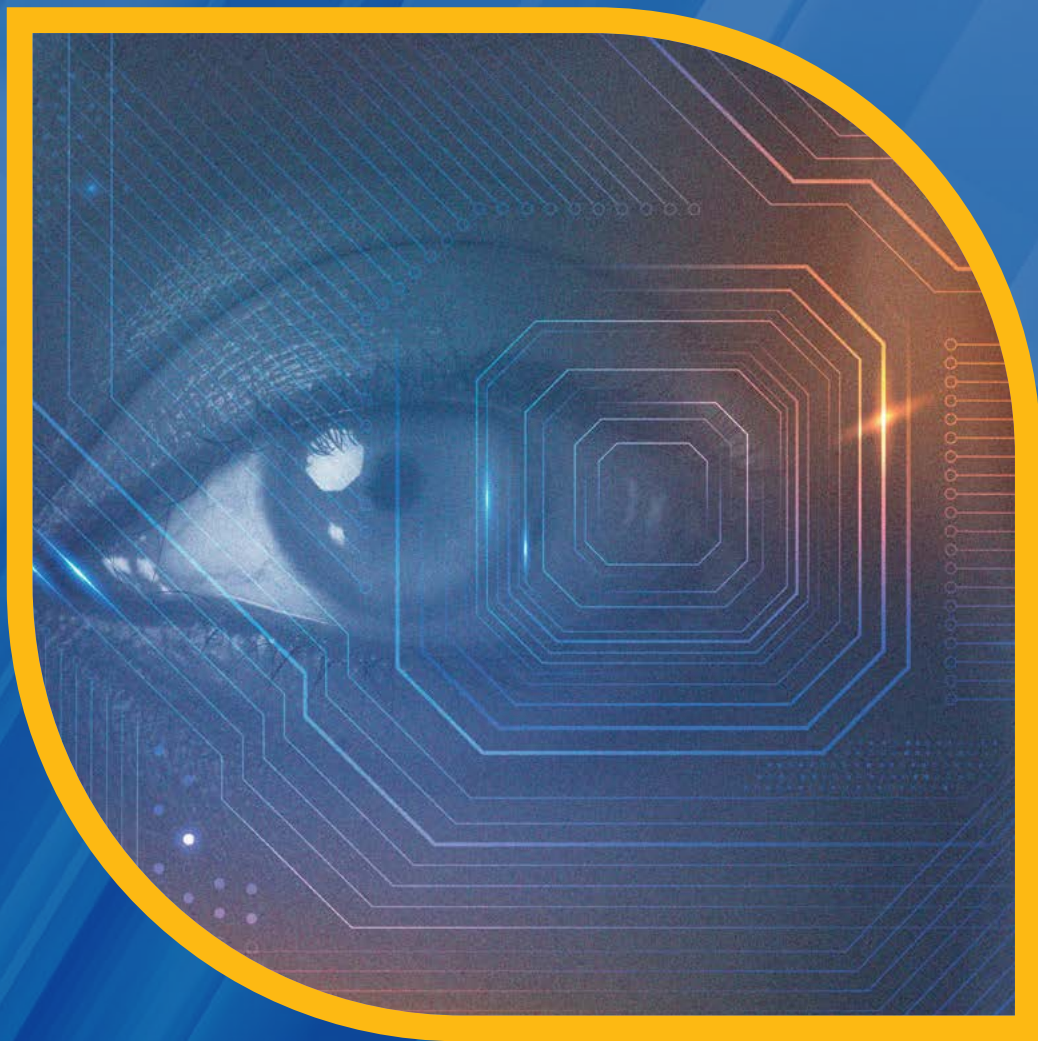


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# MONITOR



**FEBRUARY** 2024

# ETHIOPIA

## ADDIS SUMMIT RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT AU'S MUTED STANCE ON ETHIOPIA RIFTS

FOR YEARS, AU OFFICIALS HAVE REFRAINED FROM ADDRESSING ATROCITIES IN ETHIOPIA. ANALYSTS SAY THIS IS STRATEGIC.

14 FEB 2024

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From Thursday, African leaders will gather in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, home of the African Union (AU), for the continental body's annual summit. According to AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, regional integration and "maintaining momentum in addressing issues of peace and security" is high on the agenda.

But in an ironic twist, the host of the summit has either initiated or been involved in multiple conflicts in the last three years. Ethiopia's two-year civil war with the state of Tigray may have ended in November 2022 after a Pretoria pact, but federal troops are currently upping drone strikes against rebels known as Fano militia in the state of Amhara, next door to Tigray. This week, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council said "at least 45 civilians" had been killed by federal troops in Amhara. Within the Horn of Africa, Addis Ababa's relations with neighboring Mogadishu are frosty after Abiy Ahmed's government announced a port deal this January with the autonomous region of Somaliland in return for recognition of its statehood – a development that has immensely angered Somalia.

Last month, Mahamat addressed a presummit session of the AU's Permanent Representative's Committee, stressing the importance of continent-wide solidarity and unity, citing conflicts in Sudan and Chad. He also called for a humanitarian ceasefire to end the war in Gaza.

But there was no mention of Ethiopia.

For years, AU officials have refrained from addressing atrocities in their host nation, maintaining a somewhat passive stance – or even supporting it.

Two months after Prime Minister Abiy sent troops into Tigray in 2020 – the advent of a war some researchers are now calling the deadliest of the 21st century due to an estimated 600,000 civilian deaths – Mahamat seemingly applauded the deployment, describing it as a bold step "to preserve the unity, stability, and respect for the constitutional order of the country".

The comments came shortly after the AU dismissed a Tigrayan serving the bloc as a security adviser, acquiescing to a request by Abiy's government that he be fired. Nearly a year later, in a post it deleted and apologized for, the AU's official X account (then Twitter) slammed the United States for urging the warring factions to consider dialogue.

“We’ve documented lots of massacres and worked to inform the outside world about such events,” explains Jan Nyssen, a geographer at Ghent University who led its research into the war’s casualties. “But the reaction of the African Union was very weak. The only [African leader] to express concern was Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame who had asked the international community to prioritize the Tigray war in early 2021.

## NO SCRUTINY

Formally established in 2002, the AU’s precursor, the Organization for African Unity (OAU) was founded in Addis Ababa in 1963 to lobby for the independence of African states from European colonial powers – and economic empowerment. Ethiopia had long been identified as a home for Pan-Africanism, as the only African country to have fended off European colonization, militarily.

The OAU’s founders, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie and Ghana’s President Kwame Nkrumah are widely credited as visionaries for an integrated Africa, and statues commemorating both men are outside the AU’s Chinese-built headquarters in Addis Ababa today.

Their ideals were passed onto the AU when it launched in the 2000s, with the added objective of fostering democracy. But the body has been frequently criticized for propping up ageing dictators, often at the expense of the civil liberties of millions of young Africans.

Indeed, Ethiopia, enshrined in African history for its 19th-century battlefield victories over invading Italy, its role in the OAU’s establishment, and key diplomatic influence on the continent, has rarely come under scrutiny of any kind from the AU.

This, despite a history of domestic turmoil: for example, mass arrests of street hawkers and the homeless in Addis Ababa, to keep out of view of visiting dignitaries and release after their departure, has gone unnoticed.

In the hotly contested 2005 elections, then-Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi declared victory for his Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) party amid opposition complaints of vote rigging.

Despite allegations of fraud and killings of opposition demonstrators, AU observers declared the election results valid, much to the chagrin of observers from the European Union and human rights researchers.

In 2016, following a year of antigovernment demonstrations and police killings of hundreds of unarmed protesters in the Oromia and Amhara regions, home to two-thirds of the country’s 119 million people, the then AU Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma issued a muted call for restraint while shying away from condemning the violence.

## STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Indeed Ethiopia has often gotten a pass from the international community despite several human rights violations and questionable foreign policies.

In the post-9/11 counterinsurgency era, Ethiopia gained influence as a strategic partner to the US and some analysts say that may have contributed to a reluctance within and outside the continent to confront Addis Ababa on domestic matters.

It was one of only two African countries to support US President George W Bush's 2003 invasion of Iraq. The US returned the favor a few years later, offering air support for Ethiopia's 2006 military incursion into neighboring Somalia to eliminate fighters of the Islamic Courts Union.

Reports of war crimes by Ethiopian troops in Somalia resulted in no diplomatic repercussions: instead, within a few years, the US was operating a drone base from Ethiopia for counterinsurgency operations against Somalia-based al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabab; in 2013, reports emerged that the United Kingdom was funding an Ethiopian paramilitary force, despite its implication in war crimes in Ethiopia's Somali region. In 2015, US President Barack Obama visited the country and praised its democratic process, which helped the governing party win 100 percent of contested seats in elections marred by irregularities that year.

Proximity to China enhanced Ethiopia's infrastructural development and led to its emergence as one of the world's fastest-growing economies. That, its strategic alignment with the West on security issues, and its status as a leading contributor of troops to UN peacekeeping missions also helped Addis Ababa carve a reputation as a trusted regional power.

Emboldened, Ethiopia could seemingly do no wrong even as Eritrea, its main foe since a bitter border war between them from 1998 to 2000, became a pariah state.

"The fact that Ethiopia has a legacy of training and supporting African liberation movements may also explain the reticence," says author and researcher Mohamed Kheir Omer.

## A CONTROVERSIAL MEDIATOR

Even the AU's late efforts in mediation in the Tigray conflict are mired in controversy.

For most of the war, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) balked at the idea of the AU serving as a third-party mediator, accusing it of bias. Critics also questioned the impartiality of the AU's appointed chief mediator, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Obasanjo, who shuttled between Tigray and Addis Ababa during the peace process, spent intervals travelling across Ethiopia often accompanied by Abiy, with whom he was seen smiling and holding hands during a sightseeing tour of the Oromia region's flora.

But by September 2022, following battlefield reversals, the TPLF begrudgingly agreed to AU-led peace talks. With Obasanjo and involvement from the US and South Africa, the parties signed the November 2022 Pretoria agreement, ending two years of war.

The mediators won plaudits for their role in the truce which paved the way for the restoration of severed communications in Tigray, and the end of a deadly humanitarian siege. But the AU has since walked back on an initiative to secure accountability and justice for victims of war crimes, a core tenet of the Pretoria treaty.

In July, local news magazine Addis Standard broke the news that the AU's Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) had quietly ended its inquiry into atrocities during the war and even deleted its webpage from the AU's official website two years after its launch. The peace agreement was cited as the official reason for the inquiry's termination.

"The government had expressed its displeasure with the AU's inquiry, calling it 'regrettable' and 'unilateral,'" explains journalist and Addis Standard magazine's founder Tsedale Lemma. "It was a sign that whatever the Tigray inquiry was planning to achieve would be unwelcome by the African Union's host state ... [the ACHPR] never made a single report of the outcome public, if it had any," she added. "Nor is there any public record of them making a trip to the then-besieged Tigray region."

"Despite five years of war in Oromia and six months of it in Amhara, and egregious conflict-related human rights violations in its back yard, I'm yet to see the AU's Peace and Security Council convene a single meeting to discuss helping Ethiopia end either conflict."

SOURCE: ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/2/14/addis-summit-raises-questions-about-ethiopia-many-conflicts>.



# SOMALIA

## SOMALIA PRESIDENT ACCUSES ETHIOPIA OF TRYING TO ANNEX PART OF ITS TERRITORY

PRESIDENT MOHAMUD 'CATEGORICALLY OBJECTS' TO ETHIOPIA'S RED SEA PORT DEAL WITH SOMALILAND, TERRITORY SOMALIA CLAIMS AS ITS OWN.

17 FEB 2024

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Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has accused Ethiopia of trying to annex part of his country's territory by signing a sea access deal with the breakaway region of Somaliland.

Speaking at the African Union summit in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa on Saturday, Mohamud also said Ethiopian security forces tried to block his access to the summit amid a dispute between the two countries.

The agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland signed on January 1 "is nothing more than annexing part of Somalia to Ethiopia, and changing the borders of Somalia," Mohamud told reporters. "Somalia categorically objects to that."

As part of the deal, signed by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somaliland's leader Muse Bihi Abdi, Somaliland grants Ethiopia a 50-year lease on a naval base with access to Somaliland's Berbera port for commercial marine operations.

Neither side has made the terms of the deal public, but it appears to give Ethiopia the right to build a port in Somaliland in exchange for recognition.

Somaliland has enjoyed de facto independence for three decades, but Somalia considers the self-governing region and its four million people to be a part of its northern territory.

Mogadishu regards any international recognition of Somaliland as an attack on Somalia's sovereignty, and the Somali government has called the port deal with Addis Ababa "outrageous" and "unauthorized".

"Ethiopia is misleading the world by claiming that they need an access to the sea," Mohamud said on Saturday. "The question is not an access to the sea. The question is how Ethiopia wants access to the sea."

He claimed senior officers from Ethiopia's military were in Somaliland "preparing the ground" for the territory's annexation. It was not possible to verify his allegation.

Somalia has suggested it would be prepared to go to war to stop Ethiopia from building a port in Somaliland. But Ethiopia's Abiy has played down fears of an armed conflict over the Somaliland deal, telling lawmakers earlier this month that he had "no intention" of going to war with Somalia.

## 'PROVOCATION'

Reporting from Addis Ababa on Saturday, Al Jazeera's Mohamed Vall noted that Somalia's president had been very outspoken in his remarks at the AU Summit.

"[Mohamud] accused Ethiopia not just looking for access to the sea in a normal way, because Ethiopia has lots of other neighbors who have access to the sea, who have sea shores ... The real purpose, he said, of Ethiopia's [deal] is to annex Somaliland, which is a part of the sovereign republic of Somalia," Vall said.

"The Somali president condemned the behavior of the Ethiopian government, saying that they have even tried to block his access to the venue of the summit today," our correspondent added. "He wondered how can this happen in a country that hosts the AU, an organization based on equality between African states and the freedom of the leaders coming here to access the summit."

Mohamud, attending the 37th summit of the AU, said that Ethiopian security services tried to block him from leaving his hotel in Addis Ababa on Saturday morning, forcing him to travel in the convoy of Djibouti's president.

When the pair arrived at the AU headquarters, armed guards tried to prevent them from entering the building, Mohamud said, describing the alleged action as "provocation".

Ethiopia however said it had "warmly welcomed" Mohamud and accorded him the full honors of visiting heads of state and governments to the summit.

Prime Minister Abiy's spokesperson Billene Seyoum told the AFP news agency that the Somalia delegation was blocked when its security detail tried to enter a venue with weapons.

"The Somali delegation security attempted to enter the AUC premises with weapons which was blocked off by AUC security," she said.

As African leaders convene in Ethiopia for the AU summit, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh also attended the two-day gathering and raised the issue of Israel's war in Gaza with leaders of the AU who remain divided over their support for Palestine.

SOURCE: ALJAZEERAANDNEWSAGENCIES: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/17/somalia-president-accuses-ethiopia-of-trying-to-annex-part-of-its-territory>.

## RWANDA

### THE UNITED STATES TELLS RWANDA AND CONGO THEY MUST ‘WALK BACK FROM THE BRINK OF WAR’

FEBRUARY 21, 2024

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UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United States told Rwanda and Congo on Tuesday that they “must walk back from the brink of war,” the sharpest warning yet of a looming conflict between the African neighbors.

U.S. deputy ambassador Robert Wood delivered the warning at an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council called by France as violence has worsened in Congo’s mineral-rich east which borders Rwanda.

Wood said Rwanda and Congo, along with “regional actors,” should immediately resume diplomatic talks. “These regional diplomatic efforts, not military conflict, are the only path toward a negotiated solution and sustainable peace,” he stressed.

The U.S. warning follows the Rwandan Foreign Ministry’s rejection on Monday of U.S. calls for the withdrawal of its troops and surface-to-air missile systems from eastern Congo.

The Rwanda ministry’s statement said its troops are defending Rwandan territory as Congo carries out a “dramatic military build-up” near the border.

The ministry spoke of threats to Rwandan national security stemming from the presence in Congo of an armed group whose members include alleged perpetrators of the 1994 genocide in which more than 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutus who tried to protect them were killed.

The rebel group, known by its initials FDLR, “is fully integrated into” the Congolese army, the statement said. Although Rwanda has long cited a threat posed by FLDR, authorities there had never admitted to a military presence in eastern Congo.

Congolese authorities accuse the central African country of actively supporting M23.

Congo’s U.N. Ambassador Zenon Ngay Mukongo urged the Security Council to demand that Rwanda withdraw its troops from the country without pre-conditions, and halt all support for M23.

He accused Rwanda’s army of illegally occupying part of the eastern province of North Kivu, and of providing support to M23 to destabilize Congo and “to pillage our riches, our wealth in ore and minerals” in the east.



Mukongo told the council that no attack by the FDLR from Congolese territory has been recorded against Rwanda for more than two decades. As for Rwanda's fears of genocide, he said its minority Tutsis hold power over the majority Hutus, and that will never happen in Congo which he said has hundreds of tribes, "and we live together."

He stressed that Tutsis in Congo are Congolese, and "the problems of the Congolese Tutsis will be resolved in the Congo by Congolese."

"So you stay home!" Mukongo said, as Rwanda's U.N. Ambassador Ernest Rwamucyo, sat across from him at the Security Council's horseshoe-shaped table.

Rwamucyo said the integration of the "genocidal FDLR" into the Congolese army is government policy and a great concern to his country.

This alliance continues to target innocent Kinyarwanda speaking Tutsis with violence, hate speech and murders, he said.

"We are at the brink of a very serious catastrophe in the region as a result of this," he said, warning of another possible genocide.

The recent escalation of the conflict in eastern Congo is taking place in the context of calls by the presidents of Congo and Burundi for regime change in Rwanda, Rwamucyo said.

To solve the complex security challenges in the region, he said, "a non-negotiable requirement" is ending Congo's support for the FDLR and ensuring the armed group's demobilization and repatriation to Rwanda.

Fighting near Goma, the region's largest city, has intensified in recent days as M23 rebels threatened to take over the metropolis. Residents of the nearby town of Sake have been fleeing fierce fighting between Congolese government troops and the group.

France's U.N. Ambassador Nicolas de Rivière condemned M23's recent offensive against Sake and Rwanda's support for M23 and its presence on Congolese territory. "This must end," he said, stressing that "a threshold has been crossed" by its deployment of anti-aircraft systems in Congo.

Wood, the U.S. deputy ambassador, urged the international community to take immediate steps to end the fighting and de-escalate tensions between Congo and Rwanda.

Millions of people face a grave humanitarian crisis and the scale of displacement, human rights abuses and gender-based violence is "appalling," he said.

Eastern Congo already had one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with nearly 6 million people previously displaced because of conflict, according to the U.N. Refugee Agency. There

are concerns a new disaster could largely go unnoticed because of the attention on the war in Gaza and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Wood echoed U.S. calls for M23 to immediately halt attacks and withdraw from the area, and for Rwanda to end its support for the armed group and immediately withdraw its forces and missile systems from Congo.

Sources; <https://apnews.com/article/us-un-congo-rwanda-conflict-m23-rebels-232db27d3862d8bab5bba2459a59da44>.

# KENYA

## HUNDREDS OF MOURNERS ATTEND FUNERAL FOR MARATHON STAR KIPTUM IN KENYA

THE 24-YEAR-OLD SET THE WORLD RECORD IN CHICAGO IN OCTOBER BEFORE HIS DEATH IN A CAR ACCIDENT THIS MONTH.

23 FEB 2024

Marathon world record holder Kelvin Kiptum, whose dreams of breaking the race's two-hour barrier were ended by a fatal car crash this month, has been remembered for his talent and humility at a funeral in western Kenya.

The service on Friday in his hometown, the Rift Valley village of Chepkorio, was attended by hundreds of mourners, including political and sporting dignitaries like President William Ruto and World Athletics President Sebastian Coe.

The 24-year-old Kiptum had run only three international marathons, but each was among the fastest seven ever recorded. He set the world record in Chicago in October in two hours and 35 seconds, shaving 34 seconds off his compatriot Eliud Kipchoge's mark.

Anglican Bishop Paul Korir, who presided over the service, emphasised Kiptum's humility and ties to the local community, where he had worked as a livestock herder and trained as an electrician before becoming a professional runner.

"He dined with the high and mighty, and at the same time, he came to play pool at Chepkorio," Korir said.

His sudden death has left Kenya and the wider athletics community reeling.

"He was a real superstar whose path was on a spectacular upward trajectory," said Jack Tuwei, president of Athletics Kenya. "All indications were he was going to beat the two-hour barrier."

"Fare thee well champ," was the front-page headline of Kenya's leading Daily Nation newspaper on Friday.

Mourners, including 1,500-metre record holder Faith Kipyegon, started arriving for the funeral at dawn, some wearing black T-shirts with a picture of Kiptum on the front. They viewed the body, laid out in a half-open coffin on a red carpet as a choir sang religious songs.

Four giant screens streamed the service for the many villagers gathered outside the venue.

Kiptum will be buried later on Friday in a family plot near the city of Eldoret, where the government is now building a house for his wife and two children.

His widow, Asenath Cheruto, said she and Kiptum, who had a traditional marriage in 2017, had planned to hold a “colourful wedding ceremony” in April. “You have been the best husband and father to our children,” she said, breaking down into sobs.

Kiptum had hoped to break two hours at a marathon in Rotterdam in April and was also expected to make his Olympic debut in Paris this year in what could have been his first head-to-head match-up with Kipchoge. He and his coach Gervais Hakizimana, a 36-year-old Rwandan, were killed when the runner lost control of the vehicle he was driving.

SOURCE: NEWSAGENCIES: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/23/hundreds-of-mourners-attend-funeral-for-marathon-star-kiptum-in-kenya>.

## WOMEN AND LAWYERS DEMONSTRATE NATIONWIDE.

23 FEB 2024

A wave of protests rocked Kenya in January, with thousands of people taking to the streets in support of the independence of the judiciary and women’s rights. With hundreds of demonstrations reported throughout the country, January marked a new record high in the number of protest events recorded by ACLED since July 2023, when thousands of Kenyans demonstrated against the cost of living and new taxes. Mobilization of lawyers’ and women’s organizations ignited the latest protest movements. The Law Society of Kenya (LSK) mobilized in support of the judiciary amidst a row between Kenyan President William Ruto and the courts, which Ruto accuses of siding with the opposition.<sup>1</sup>Vivianne Wandera, ‘Why is President Ruto in a Row with Kenya’s Judiciary: a simple guide,’ Al Jazeera, 5 January 2024 Another wave of protest emerged over a spate of violence against women.<sup>2</sup>United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, ‘Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killing of women and girls (also referred to as “femicide/feminicide”),’ March 2022 The Africa Data Hub reports that over 500 women were victims of femicide between 2016 and 2023, mostly by intimate partners, family, or friends.<sup>3</sup>Africa Data Hub, ‘Silencing Women,’ accessed on 16 February 2024 This nationwide mobilization points to the relevance of such issues — the independence of the judiciary and women’s role in society — in spurring political and social activism in Kenya.

## THE CLASH OF POWERS: THE REASON BEHIND THE EXECUTIVE AND JUDICIAL TENSION

Several peaceful protests were organized by the LSK on 12 and 17 January in some of Kenya’s largest cities, including Nairobi and Mombasa (see map below). The LSK is a bar association with over 20,000 members whose main objective is to promote the rule of law in Kenya.<sup>4</sup>Law Society of Kenya, accessed on 20 February 2024 the protests were organized in support of the judiciary amid a row between President William Ruto and the courts. This row is connected

to the 2023 Finance Act, which aims to increase government revenue through implementing various taxes, including a housing levy and increased VAT on petroleum products. The Finance Act was signed into law in June 2023, in the wake of a series of demonstrations triggered by the high cost of living (for more, see Kenya Situation Update April 2023 and June 2023). As a result, the High Court of Kenya initially suspended the bill after nine petitions were submitted to the court, saying its contents violated provisions of the constitution and the 2012 Public Finance Management Act.<sup>5</sup> Fred Obura, 'Judges Lift Order Suspending Kenya's Finance Act 2023,' The Kenya Wall Street, 31 July 2023; Reuters, 'Kenya supreme court upholds ruling in favour of 2023 finance law,' 8 September 2023

Sources: <https://reliefweb.int/report/kenya/kenya-situation-update-february-2024>.

# MADAGASCAR

## MADAGASCAR: AUTHORITIES MUST REPEAL THE LEGALIZATION OF CHEMICAL AND SURGICAL CASTRATION OF RAPISTS

FEBRUARY 8, 2024

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Reacting to the proposed amendments to the Malagasy Penal Code, which now allow for chemical and surgical castration as punishment for rape against minors, Tigere Chagutah, Regional Director of Amnesty International in East and Southern Africa, said:

“In Madagascar, rape cases remain under-reported, and perpetrators often go free due to the victims’ and their families’ fear of retaliation, stigmatization, and a lack of trust in the judicial system.

“Implementing chemical and surgical castration, which constitutes cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, as a punishment for those found guilty of raping minors is inconsistent with Malagasy constitutional provisions against torture and other ill-treatment, as well as regional and international human rights standards.

“The Malagasy authorities must instead prioritize a survivor-centered approach, which empowers and enables survivors to report safely without fear of stigmatization and retaliation; effectively holds perpetrator to account and introduces necessary reforms to the criminal justice system to ensure survivors can access timely justice and remedies, and moreover, strengthens prevention efforts to address and eliminate root causes”

On January 24, 2024, the bill intending to insert chemical and surgical castration into the Malagasy Penal Code as punishment for individuals found guilty of rape against minors was deposited before the Malagasy National Assembly for adoption. The National Assembly adopted it on February 2, 2024, and the Senate adopted it on February 7, 2024. The bill is to go through the Supreme Constitutional Court before President Andry Rajoelina signs into law the new amendments.

Amnesty International strongly urges the Malagasy authorities to bring the amendments in line with human rights standards while prioritizing the well-being, rights and needs of survivors.

Source: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/madagascar-authorities-must-repeal-the-legalization-of-chemical-and-surgical-castration-of-rapists/>.



# COMOROS

## WHY IS FRANCE REVOKING BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP IN MAYOTTE?

FRANCE ANNOUNCES CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT AIMED AT CURBING IMMIGRATION IN ITS OVERSEAS TERRITORY NEAR MADAGASCAR.

FEBRUARY 2024

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France has announced a controversial plan to amend the constitution to restrict citizenship to people born to immigrants in the overseas territory of Mayotte in a move aimed at curbing immigration to the Indian Ocean islands.

The move has been welcomed by the far-right but opposed by socialists who say birthright citizenship rule is “non-negotiable”. Leftist leaders fear the constitutional amendment will open Pandora’s box as the far right will try to emulate it in mainland France.

The announcement comes less than three weeks after France’s highest court scrapped large parts of a new immigration law designed to toughen access to welfare benefits for foreigners and curb immigration – a hot potato in the country.

Here is more about Mayotte – an archipelago between Madagascar and the African mainland – and why the change has triggered controversy.

### WHAT HAS FRANCE ANNOUNCED?

French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin on Sunday announced that children of immigrants born in Mayotte, comprising of two islands, would no longer automatically become French citizens.

The decision comes after weeks of protests in Mayotte, which has seen the deterioration of living conditions blamed on immigration from impoverished Comoro islands.

“It will no longer be possible to become French if you are not the child of a French parent,” Darmanin said.

France currently grants citizenship through both parentage and birthplace. The latest proposal would cause further political tensions in France in the wake of the a But the French interior minister assured that the “radical measure” would be “limited to the Mayotte archipelago”.

## WHERE IS MAYOTTE?

Mayotte is one of the five overseas departments of France located in the Indian Ocean, off the East African coast comprising of two islands.

adoption of a new immigration law.

The others in the surrounding archipelago sought independence, becoming the Comoros Islands.

The Muslim-majority overseas territory, which voted to stay part of France in 1974, became a full-fledged French department in 2011.

## WHAT ARE FRENCH OVERSEAS TERRITORIES?

France administers 12 territories outside of Europe, known as French overseas territories. These territories exist under various statuses as part of the French state and are largely remnants of the French colonial empire.

The French overseas territories, which are divided into three categories: overseas departments, overseas communities, and special territories, are collectively home to more than 2.6 million people.

## WHY IS FRANCE PLANNING TO REVOKE BIRTHPLACE CITIZENSHIP IN MAYOTTE?

Sunday's decision by the French interior minister came in a bid to curb immigration in Mayotte, which has seen gang violence amid declining living standards. Darmanin said the reform was the idea of French President Emmanuel Macron.

More than 40 percent of the islanders survive on less than 160 euros (\$172) per month, says INSEE.

Residence permits issued to foreigners in Mayotte are only valid for the island and cannot be used to travel to mainland France. The scrapping of that system is one of the key demands of the protesters.

Darmanin said the authorities would abolish the measure as part of the reform, which some protesters welcomed.

## WHAT ARE THE REACTIONS TO FRANCE'S ANNOUNCEMENT?

Boris Vallaud, head of the Socialists in the National Assembly, said they would oppose the revision of the constitution. “Birthright citizenship is not negotiable,” he told a local broadcaster.

The decision was also denounced by Manon Aubry of the far-left France Unbowed (LFI) party. President Macron’s administration was “attacking the very concept of nationality, the foundation of the Republic”, she wrote on X.

French advocacy group SOS Racisme also denounced what it called “a particularly spectacular calling into question of the principle of equality”. Centrist MP Aurelien Tache told local media that “if this provision is enacted and if Marine Le Pen then comes to power, it will be the end of birthright citizenship in France”.

But Eric Ciotti, leader of the right-wing Republicans party, welcomed Darmanin’s proposed reform – but complained it did not go far enough. The measure should be applied across the whole of French territory, he said.

Sebastien Chenu, spokesman for Le Pen’s far-right National Rally took a similar line.

Mayotte residents say the arrival of immigrants has put health, housing and education services under pressure. In the capital Mamoudzou, several hundred protesters greeted Darmanin and his entourage with boos and shouts of “Mayotte is angry” amid the lack of basic amenities including water shortage.

Darmanin said the measure would reduce “the attractiveness” of the archipelago for prospective immigrants.

According to France’s National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), the 375sq km (145sq miles) island is home to around 310,000 people, but officials say this figure is seriously underestimated. Le Pen’s niece, Marion Marechal of the far-right Reconquete party, also welcomed the announcement.

## HAS FRANCE HAD TENSIONS WITH OTHER OVERSEAS TERRITORIES?

Macron has proven unpopular throughout France’s overseas territories. In the last presidential election, majorities of voters throughout the overseas territories voted for far-right candidate Marina Le Pen over Macron. Le Pen won 41 percent of the vote.

This distrust in the system stems from the discriminatory treatment of the territories as compared to mainland France.

After Macron was elected in 2017, a social movement sprung up in French Guiana in protest of inadequate public service in the region. The president responded saying he is no Santa Claus.

During his election campaign, he also incorrectly called French Guiana an island.

Later, Macron's government shut down France O, a television channel featuring programming from overseas departments.

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French departments Martinique and neighbouring Guadeloupe also saw street demonstrations and unrest following mandatory vaccination rules for health workers.

SOURCE: ALJAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/14/why-is-france-revoking-birth-right-citizenship-in-mayotte>.

# SUDAN

## SUDAN: THE SAF BREAKS THE SIEGE

### THE SAF BREAKS SIEGE

16 FEBRUARY 2024

Ten months into the conflict between the SAF and the RSF, the war in Sudan has taken a new turn. The fall of al-Jazirah in December 2023 sparked armed mobilization in regions controlled by the SAF, with self-defense militias arming themselves to protect against the advancing RSF. Less than a month later, the SAF transitioned from a tactical defensive mode into an offensive one, regaining territories from the RSF and establishing checkpoints to consolidate its gains around its bases in Khartoum. Notably, the SAF now appears on the verge of breaking the RSF siege on the Engineers Corps in Omdurman, where the SAF has been on the defensive since April 2023. Other gains were made in North Bahri in Khartoum, while mediation attempts by the West Kordofan native administration failed to prevent clashes between the RSF and members of the SAF 22nd Infantry Division in Babanusa. In South Kordofan, a faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu turned to the SAF to repel an RSF attack on Dilling.

### THE FIGHT TO REUNIFY FORCES SPLIT IN KHARTOUM

The SAF's withdrawal from Wad Madani, the capital of al-Jazirah state, in December 2023, attracted widespread criticism against the SAF, including claims that SAF commanders were colluding with the RSF. These losses, however, prompted the formation of self-defense militias and enabled a tactical shift in the SAF from defense to offense. Since April 2023, Khartoum's metropolitan area has been the epicenter of fighting between the SAF and the RSF, with the former strategically adopting a defensive stance and concentrating its efforts on maintaining control of its military bases. However, in January, the SAF initiated a coordinated offensive against the RSF on various fronts in Khartoum's tri-cities, reclaiming control over several territories (*see map below*).

The RSF's focus on maintaining control in Darfur, al-Jazirah, and other active frontlines, and the isolation of its forces in Old Omdurman, created an opportunity for the SAF to begin its offensive. The first target was the SAF-controlled Engineers Corps military base in south Omdurman. Since the outbreak of the conflict, the RSF has imposed a siege on the base, targeting the SAF troops with artillery and sniper fire. The siege limited the movements of the SAF troops, with the RSF using the surrounding civilian neighborhoods (such as al-Arda and al-Abbasiya) as hideouts. Direct confrontations between the SAF and the RSF were thus limited to frequent exchanges of fire between the two sides.

On 8 January, SAF forces in the Engineers Corps began to attack the RSF in Omdurman, breaking the siege and forcing the RSF into a retreat. However, RSF snipers stationed in the

high-rise buildings of al-Arda neighborhood slowed down the attack, preventing the SAF from establishing a direct connection between its troops in north and south Omdurman. Although the RSF command deployed reinforcements in Omdurman, its troops struggled to maintain control over north and south Old Omdurman. Intense artillery fire and drone strikes by the SAF further limited the movements of the RSF.

At the time of writing, the RSF still maintains control over key positions in Omdurman, including al-Arda Street and the Radio and Television Commission building. The goal of the SAF offensive is to link its forces in Omdurman, eventually forcing the RSF out of the city. The RSF may, however, still circumvent the SAF Engineers Corps and impede further SAF advances, thus retaining control over parts of Omdurman. Importantly, the Engineers Corps is numerically and militarily less equipped than other SAF forces in north Omdurman, where the SAF has established its operational command center in Karrari.

Elsewhere in Khartoum, the SAF also mounted an offensive against the RSF in Bahri. At the end of January, SAF troops from the Weapons and Ammunition Corps stationed in north Bahri and SAF troops in the Reconnaissance Corps in northeast Bahri launched coordinated raids against the RSF north of the city. Supported by artillery and shelling from the SAF in Karrari, the SAF expanded its control around these bases and in the surrounding neighborhoods. Meanwhile, besieged members of the SAF in the Signal Corps in south Bahri also claimed to have pushed the RSF back. The SAF's objective behind these maneuvers might be to cut off RSF forces in the central area of Bahri from their supply route in Sharg al-Nile and besiege them from three fronts — north, east, and south of the city. The RSF forces in the central Bahri area may become isolated as the Shambat bridge, which served as their access point to Omdurman, was destroyed in November 2023. As a result, the SAF might have an opportunity to break the siege on the Signal Corps and, subsequently, the General Command HQ in the northern part of Khartoum city.

The SAF advancements in Omdurman mark a potential turning point in the conflict, with the possibility of regaining control over Khartoum's metropolitan area. If the SAF forces can successfully link up in Omdurman, they may be able to support their counterparts in Bahri, leveraging advancements in north Bahri to potentially secure control over both sides of the al-Halfaya bridge. If the SAF is able to link their forces in north and south Bahri, this move would effectively break the siege on the General Command headquarters.

## MEDIATION FAILURES AND SHIFTING ALLIANCES IN KORDOFAN

In January, Babanusa — a city situated in West Kordofan, near the border with South Sudan — turned into a contested battleground as the RSF attempted to seize control of the SAF-controlled 22nd Infantry Division (*see map below*). Until November 2023, Babanusa was spared the conflict, mainly due to the dominance of the Misseriya, an ethnic group with historical ties to both the SAF and the RSF. Before and after the independence of South Sudan, the SAF recruited the Misseriya to fight the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and the al-Hilu faction of SPLM-N, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Most recently, a significant portion of RSF fighters were recruited from the Misseriya ethnic group, often leading to the targeting of all ethnic Misseriya by the SAF.<sup>2</sup> After the conflict erupted in April 2023, the SAF military intelligence classified the



Misseriya tribe as supporters of the RSF in June, leading to increased tensions and targeting of Misseriya.<sup>3</sup> The designation sparked clashes between the Reserve Forces Eagles Brigade — a Hamar ethnic militia created by the SAF on 29 August — and militants from the Awlad Mansour clan of the Misseriya ethnic group in Umm Kaddada. The fighting tapped into long-standing land disputes between the Hamar and Misseriya ethnic groups in Kordofan that escalated in 2022.<sup>4</sup>

Against this backdrop is the power struggle between the SAF and the RSF. In November, SAF troops withdrew from six bases in West Kordofan, likely facilitated by the Misseriya native administration to avoid tensions between the SAF and the RSF.<sup>5</sup> On 29 November, an agreement was signed between the SAF and the RSF to stop armed clashes and airstrikes in the city.<sup>6</sup> However, on 30 December, 22 Misseriya leaders opposed the prospected removal of the SAF from Misseriya lands, as they considered that the fall of the 22nd SAF Infantry Division would leave West Kordofan without protection from cross-border raids.<sup>7</sup> Complicating matters even further, the close ties between Misseriya soldiers in both SAF and RSF led to multiple defections from the SAF to the RSF.<sup>8</sup> In January, some clans of the Misseriya ethnic group declared their support for the RSF, while others opposed this decision, threatening to fight the RSF if the force attempted to take control of Babanusa.<sup>9</sup>

SAF airstrikes began to target the RSF in El Tibbun, west of Babanusa, on 13 January. In turn, on 15 January, the RSF mobilized significant forces in various directions around Babanusa, including in El Tibbun, Samoaa in the southwest, and Muglad in the south. The RSF launched an offensive on 22 January, targeting the 22nd SAF Infantry Division. The clashes continued for two weeks, during which the RSF gained control over multiple locations in the city — including several police stations — and released videos from inside the 22nd SAF Infantry Division. The SAF managed to later repel the RSF from the base. The clashes in Babanusa left at least 100 people dead and displaced another 45,000 people.<sup>10</sup> Fighting continued despite a two-day ceasefire facilitated by the Misseriya native administration on 28 January, which was intended to allow civilians trapped in conflict areas to relocate to safer locations.<sup>11</sup>

In South Kordofan, factional and ethnic divisions also intersect with the national war. Shifting alliances emerged in the city of Dilling, where the al-Hilu faction of the SPLM-N militarily supports the SAF. Communities in South Kordofan have splintered during the conflict, with the Arab tribes — particularly the Hawazmah — aligning with the RSF. The Nuba ethnic group has also split along factional lines, between clans supporting SAF and those siding with Abdelaziz al-Hilu, the long-time leader of a faction of the SPLM-N. The al-Hilu faction has controlled some parts of South Kordofan since 2012.

Al-Hilu's faction has expanded its control over South Kordofan since the outbreak of the conflict in April 2023. However, the RSF advanced in the region, threatening the power of the al-Hilu's faction. In December, the town of Habila, 50 kilometers to the east of Dilling in the Nuba mountains, fell to the RSF which formed a local administration in the locality.<sup>12</sup> Reports also emerged of targeted violence carried out by RSF fighters against members of the Nuba ethnic group.<sup>13</sup> The SPLM-N faction under the leadership of al-Hilu joined the SAF on 6 January to defend Dilling from other RSF attacks.<sup>14</sup>

The outbreak of fighting around Dilling ignited inter-ethnic violence. While al-Hilu's intervention is more likely aimed at preserving its areas of control rather than seizing Dilling, several neighborhoods affiliated with the RSF-aligned Hawazmah tribe in Dilling were reportedly burned by SAF and al-Hilu as retribution for the tribe's support to the RSF. The RSF accused the SAF and the SPLM-N-al-Hilu of ethnic cleansing against the Hawazamah.<sup>15</sup> The violence persisted for several days, with the SAF and SPLM-N-al-Hilu pounding RSF positions and in Dilling.

These developments highlight the multiple intersecting layers of the war in Sudan. From Darfur to Kordofan, ethnic divisions intersect with the national war between the SAF and the RSF, igniting or escalating existing inter-ethnic tensions. In West Kordofan, the RSF's insistence on overtaking Babanusa may prompt the fragmentation of the Misseriya tribe, whose members maintain ties with both the SAF and the RSF.

For its part, the SPLM-N's al-Hilu faction's support for the SAF in Dilling mirrors a decision made by the Abdul Wahid al-Nur faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) to deploy forces in North Darfur when it faced the RSF in November (*for more, see the December 2023 Sudan Situation Update*). The mobilization of rebel groups and ethnic militias in North Darfur forced the RSF to avoid a direct confrontation. In Kordofan, a sustained collaboration between the SAF and al-Hilu may push the RSF out of Dilling and other areas where the al-Hilu faction of the SPLM-N holds sway. However, clashes between these collaborators elsewhere in South Kordofan add to the uncertainty of the situation.

Sources: <https://acleddata.com/2024/02/16/sudan-situation-update-february-2024-sudan-the-saf-breaks-the-siege/>.

# TANZANIA

## WHAT'S FUELLING THE DEADLY CHOLERA OUTBREAK IN SOUTHERN AFRICA?

UNCHECKED BORDER MOVEMENT AND POOR SEWAGE SYSTEMS HAVE A NEW PARTNER IN INFLICTING MISERY: CLIMATE CHANGE.

20 FEB 2024

A severe cholera outbreak is currently ravaging communities in Southern Africa, spreading across borders in what experts say is the worst such crisis involving the illness that the region has seen in a decade.

Thousands of people have died, and thousands of others have been infected with the acute diarrheal disease in at least seven countries. In some of the hardest-hit countries, the outbreak forced millions of students to stay back home in January.

Across the region, emergency response centers have sprung up in school fields and stadiums, and are teeming with groaning patients in pain. Fears are mounting that if the outbreak is not tackled soon, healthcare staff could be overwhelmed.

In an emergency summoning to address the outbreak earlier this month, leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) said they were working to stop the spread, but a lack of clean water, weak cross-border checks, and a global shortage of vaccines could test that resolve.

Here's a breakdown of what's causing the spread and how many people have been affected:

### HOW WIDESPREAD IS THE OUTBREAK?

Caused by the *vibrio cholerae* bacteria, cholera infects the small intestine, producing toxins that the body works hard to expel by secreting large amounts of vomit or watery diarrhoea, leading to rapid dehydration. Mild cases can disappear after a few days of oral rehydration treatment, but in severe cases – approximately one in 10 – it could lead to death within a day if left untreated.

Since January 2022, at least 188,000 people have been infected with cholera across seven countries in Southern Africa: Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo. More than 4,100 people have died, according to the UN humanitarian agency, OCHA.

The disease has been spreading since 2022. Although badly hit Zambia only reported its first case in October 2023, more than 18,804 people were infected by Thursday, in what authorities say is the country's worst outbreak ever. At least 658 people have died since October.

Malawi, with at least 59,000 cases since early 2022, is also reporting its largest cholera outbreak ever. In Zimbabwe, 21,000 cases since February 2023 make this epidemic the second-worst on record. DRC, which is also a member of the SADC, has the highest number of infections at 71,000, while South Africa has recorded the lowest number of cases, at 1,076 people.

Monthly cases across the affected countries hovered around 2,000 infections since January 2023, but then peaked in January 2024 at 3,400 cases, suggesting higher transmission levels going into February.

## WHAT'S FUELLING THIS OUTBREAK?

Cholera typically spreads when people ingest water or food that's contaminated. The disease is common in areas with poor sanitation, or in conflict zones where drinking water sources might be contaminated with faecal matter or wastewater from sewers.

Although endemic to Africa and parts of Asia, experts say it's rare for several countries to experience outbreaks simultaneously, as is the case in southern Africa. The outbreak was likely triggered by a cocktail of issues, rather than a single event.

Regular, unchecked cross-border movement, for example, means infections can be transported: One 2023 study found that two sisters who had travelled from South Africa to a cholera hot spot in Malawi infected a third person on their return and that the strain that is currently spreading is originally from South Asia. While it's rare for people to transfer the infection through casual contact, poor hygiene can lead to faecal matter from an infected person contaminating food meant for others.

Poor sewage systems, alongside inadequate clean water sources for drinking, cooking and hygiene are also a persistent problem in the region. More than half of the population in rural communities in Southern African countries — except for South Africa and Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland — have no access to sanitation facilities like toilets (PDF). In South Africa, researchers say 80 percent of wastewater systems need upgrading.

Increasingly frequent and more severe flooding linked to climate change has an impact too, experts have said. Anja du Plessis of the University of South Africa (UNISA) told Al Jazeera that cholera occurs more in the rainy season, which the region is currently experiencing. Flooding “results in more run-off containing more pathogens, increasing the risk of contamination,” she said. Cyclone Kenneth tore through Madagascar, Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe, in March 2023, and likely worsened cholera transmission.

At the moment, cholera vaccines used both preventively and reactively are scarce, forcing the World Health Organization (WHO) to abandon the usual two-dose oral application for a single dose. Some 29 countries reported cholera outbreaks in 2022, an increase from the average of 20 reporting countries annually.

That uptick has stretched the estimated 36 million doses available yearly. There's only one

available manufacturer of the dose at the moment – South Korean firm EU Biologics – and it’s already producing at maximum capacity, according to WHO. While two doses of the vaccine can stop cholera for about three years, one dose reduces the immunity period to between six months and two years.

## HOW ARE SADC COUNTRIES RESPONDING?

At an emergency summit on February 2, SADC leaders promised to increase funding for water systems and to work on a cross-country response plan to monitor cholera spread, especially after climate change-linked natural disasters. The leaders also aim to start manufacturing cholera vaccines regionally, although they acknowledged they don’t have enough resources to buy medical supplies like test kits.

But some are skeptical and say community-based campaigns in the short term might be more effective than SADC’s plans. “The response so far has been poor [and] we will have to see if their words are transformed into action,” du Plessis of UNISA said. “We can however not depend and wait on the governments to take action. Communities should be properly informed on WASH [water and sanitation hygiene] facilities and practices so that the rate of the outbreak can be curbed.”

In Zambia, authorities delayed January school resumption for four million students by about a month so they could install handwashing stations. As school opened in February, flyers went up on walls teaching students about the disease and urging them to wash their hands before handling food.

Although authorities there announced continuing talks with the WHO to ship in more vaccines in January, those doses have not arrived yet. Meanwhile, the Africa Center for Communicable Diseases (Africa CDC) has pledged a one-million-dollar intervention fund for Lusaka to train health workers and buy medical supplies.

On a list of several worries is the rainy season which will last through February. Forecasts predicted normal to above-normal rainfall this season, meaning there could be an uptick in infections. In early February, UNICEF said severe flooding in the DRC might escalate the outbreak there and could see infections transported to densely populated cities.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/20/whats-fuelling-the-deadly-cholera-outbreak-in-southern-africa>.

## DRC

# A GUIDE TO THE DECADES-LONG CONFLICT IN DR CONGO

THE RESOURCE-RICH COUNTRY, NOW FACING A MAJOR REBEL ATTACK, HAS BEEN RACKED BY CONFLICT FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS.

21 FEB 2024

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Escalating tensions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have once again drawn global attention to the security crisis in the African country's mineral-rich eastern region.

Heavy fighting between the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) and the M23 rebel group in the country's troubled North Kivu province has forced thousands of civilians to flee their homes in the past two weeks, taking what little they can. Dozens have been killed and hundreds of thousands displaced since January.

There are fears that the regional capital, Goma – home to some two million people and about half a million displaced people seeking refuge there – could soon fall to an advancing M23, a potentially devastating blow to the Congolese government's control of the region.

The UN Security Council voiced concern at the “escalating violence” after M23 shelled Goma airport, damaging Congolese military aircraft.

Racked by conflict for more than 30 years, the DRC's insecurity is caused by complex and deep-seated factors, as well as a multitude of actors. Apart from the M23, numerous other armed groups, Congolese and foreign forces are battling for control, mostly in the eastern part of the country. Some of Kinshasa's neighbors are also implicated in the crisis.

Approximately six million people have been killed since 1996 and more than six million people remain internally displaced in eastern DRC.

## HOW DID THE 1994 RWANDAN GENOCIDE AFFECT THE DRC?

The DRC crisis originally began as a result of a series of post-colonial battles for power after independence from Belgium in 1960, which culminated in the assassination of popular leader Patrice Lumumba and the three-decade military rule under dictator Mobutu Sese Seko.

Ethnic tensions in Rwanda forced more than 300,000 people from the Tutsi minority group to flee to neighboring countries in the 1960s, particularly to the DRC. Some of those refugees regrouped and sought to seize power in Rwanda after the country gained independence from



Belgium in 1962.

In the early 1990s, the DRC saw a spillover of civil war and subsequent genocide in neighboring Rwanda. In October 1990, a civil war broke out after the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi rebel group led by current Rwandan President Paul Kagame, invaded the country from its Ugandan base. In April 1994, extremist Hutu militias attacked Tutsis and moderate Hutus, killing 800,000 to a million people over 100 days in what is now known as the Rwandan genocide. Hutus form some 80 percent of Rwanda's population.

Kagame's RPF seized the capital, Kigali, on July 4 as Hutu genocidaires, troops, and former regime leaders fled to the DRC. An estimated two million Hutu civilians fearing revenge and reprisal attacks also poured into the country.

## WHAT LED TO THE FIRST CONGO WAR OF 1996-1997?

Tensions rose between local Congolese tribes, Rwandan emigrants from the colonial and pre-1960 independence periods, and those who fled the 1994 war. Often, local tribes battled Tutsis, but conflicts also existed with the Hutus, as locals feared they would be outnumbered. Earlier emigrants had rights to Congolese citizenship, but later emigrants were regarded as refugees and many were housed in camps.

Hutu militias who fled Kagame's rule to refugee camps in eastern DRC began to regroup to restore a Hutu government in Kigali. They launched attacks on Rwanda and also killed Tutsis inside the Congo. In response, Rwanda started to arm Tutsi militias inside the DRC.

Across the DRC, many Congolese were resentful of Mobutu's corrupt rule. Rebel groups seeking to overthrow him emerged, including the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), led by Laurent-Desire Kabila.

Rwanda, which accused Mobutu of harboring Hutu perpetrators of genocide, armed the rebels and sent in Rwandan troops in 1996.

On October 24, 1996, the Tutsi-dominated AFDL in Kivu and troops of the Rwandan army launched offensives in eastern DRC, sparking the First Congo War. Uganda, Eritrea, Angola, and Burundi – all Rwandan allies – joined the war.

The AFDL seized power on May 17, 1997, ending the fighting, and Kabila declared himself president of the DRC. But the Rwandan troops allegedly massacred Hutu populations, forcefully repatriated Tutsis, and took control of lucrative diamond and coltan mines in the resource-rich eastern region bordering Rwanda.

## WHAT CAUSED THE 1998-2003 SECOND CONGO WAR?

After his climb to power, Kabila fell out with Kagame and started to unceremoniously force out Rwandan and other foreign troops still in the DRC. This alarmed ethnic Tutsis living in Congo and

reignited tensions with local tribes.

In response, Rwanda backed a new rebel group, the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) which launched a revolt in August 1998 and started the Second Congo War. A parallel group, the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) formed to fight alongside the RCD, also seeking to overthrow Kabila.

The DRC and rights groups claim MLC was backed by Uganda, which had also fallen out with the Kabila regime. Jean-Pierre Bemba, the present Congolese minister of defence, led the armed group that has now morphed into an opposition political party.

Kabila's government armed Hutu refugees in the east to fight back against Rwanda and RCD. Government officials publicly incited Congolese people to attack Tutsis, leading to several public lynchings. The South African Development Community (SADC) of which the DRC is a member, deployed troops from Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Angola to fight RCD and Rwandan troops.

In 1999, the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda signed a set of ceasefire agreements, including the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (1999) and the Luanda Agreement (2002) which were to see all sides stop military operations. The agreements also triggered the UN to deploy MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) troops to monitor the peace process.

However fighting persisted in many areas like gold-rich Ituri, where ethnic tensions, worsened by the war, erupted into the continuing Ituri conflict. A peacekeeper of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo looks on at the force's base during a field training exercise in Sake, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo on November 06, 2023. [Glody Murhabazi/AFP]

## HOW DID M23 AND OTHER MAJOR REBEL GROUPS EMERGE?

The arming and counter-arming of rebel militias by the Congolese government and foreign actors means there are now between 120 to 140 rebel groups operating in the DRC, mostly in the resource-rich east and northeast areas.

Several peace agreements with some of the groups over the years were meant to see operations stop and fighters integrate with the Congolese Army but have failed to permanently end their activities. The latest was the East African Community-led Nairobi Peace Process (June 2022) and the Luanda Roadmap (November 2022).

The most active armed groups at the moment are the M23, CODECO, and ADF.

**M23:** Operating in North Kivu province, the group takes its name from the March 23 Agreement of 2009 when the DRC government, under President Joseph Kabila — son of Laurent-Désiré Kabila — signed a ceasefire treaty with the Tutsi-majority National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), one of the numerous groups of fighters active since the Second Congo War.

In the agreement, the CNDP was meant to become a political party and its fighters were to integrate into the Congolese military, FARDC.

However, on April 4, 2012, 300 CNDP troops revolted, complaining of poor treatment in the army. They formed the M23, claiming to be fighting for Tutsis' rights in the DRC. In late 2012, M23 launched an offensive, seizing Goma and several other towns. A special UN force along with FARDC pushed the rebels back into the eastern hills on the border with Rwanda in 2013.

M23 resurfaced in 2022 with violent attacks and has seized at least four towns in North Kivu. The group briefly withdrew from occupied towns in January 2023 as part of the Nairobi Peace Process, but the ceasefire fell apart in October. The DRC accuses Rwanda of funding M23. A 2023 UN Group of Experts report also found that Kigali finances the group. Rwanda denies the allegations.

**ADF:** Originally from Uganda, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) also operates in the eastern DRC, in the regions bordering Uganda. The group initially claimed to be fighting for an Islamic state in Uganda where Muslims make up a minority of between 15 and 35 percent. It's not clear what boundaries the reclusive ADF wants to claim, but the group first settled in Buseruka, western Uganda, before it was pushed back into the DRC. But it has recruited along secular lines over the years. Formed in 1996, during the First Congo War, it used a weak DRC as its base to launch attacks into Uganda. Ugandan troops used their presence in the DRC during the two wars to attack ADF fighters. The group went dormant in 2001 and resurfaced in 2013. It's now reportedly linked to the ISIL (ISIS) armed group.

**CODECO:** The Cooperative for Development of the Congo (CODECO) was formed in 1999 during the Second Congo War, and operates in eastern Ituri. It was initially an agricultural cooperative but started to advocate for the Lendu ethnic group, who believed they were unfairly dominated by the rival Hema ethnic group. After a period of dormancy, CODECO launched offensives in 2017 and has continued to attack local civilians and Congolese forces. In February 2024, CODECO ambushed civilians, killing 15 people believed to be Hema in a likely continuation of the rivalry. The group has also targeted gold mines in recent weeks.

**Other actors:** Also operating are several pro-government militias and "Mai Mai" vigilante groups jointly called the Wazalendos, fighting with the Congolese Army. Some 40,000 Wazalendos have undergone military training since 2022, when current President Felix Tshisekedi called for young Congolese to help defend the country.

There's also the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), an ethnic Hutu group active since the final years of the Second Congo War and backed by the Congolese Army, according to a UN Experts Group report. Some of its leaders took part in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

FDLR, FARDC and Wazalendos have carried out extrajudicial civilian killings, sexual assaults and exploited local communities, Human Rights Watch said in 2022.

*By: Wal Nyak Dol, Betty Joggo Wani and Ricardo Makuil Dak*

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