



COI QUERY

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Title	Armed rebel groups in North and South Kivu
Reference period	January 2008 to 31 December 2013
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Cite as: Country of origin Information Query, Democratic Republic of the Congo: Armed rebel groups in North and South Kivu, 8 July 2024, [url](#)



COI QUERY RESPONSE – Democratic Republic of the Congo

Armed rebel groups in North and South Kivu

1. Background

According to the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P), around 120 militias and armed groups have been operating for nearly 30 years in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika, regularly committing ‘widespread violations and abuses against civilians that may constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.’¹ In a press release from 28 August 2012, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported that attacks carried out by armed groups in North Kivu resulted in ‘serious human rights violations including civilian massacres and the destruction and looting of homes and property, as well as the mass displacement of thousands of civilians.’²

2. Armed rebel groups

Armed groups operating in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) include the following:

2.1 Mayi-Mayi or Mai-Mai

An article published by the Journal Africa Development in 2011 described Mai Mai as ‘armed movements involved in the war that ravaged North and South Kivu in the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo.’³

According to the New Humanitarian, in the 1960s, discontented politicians in post-independence Congo organised youths into armed militia groups.⁴ Those youths were initiated under traditional customs and inspired by ‘medicine men’ who claimed to make them invincible to bullets, leading to the slogan “Mulele Maji” (“Water Water”).⁵ This belief and slogan evolved into the naming of the “Mai-Mai” or “Mayi-Mayi” militia groups.⁶

In 2008, Amnesty International (AI) reported that the Mai Mai were pro-government militias, primarily organized within a politico-military coalition known as PARECO (Patriotes Résistants

¹ GCR2P, Democratic Republic of the Congo – Population at Risk, 31 May 2024, [url](#)

² OHCHR, UN alarmed over killings in Masisi territory in DR Congo, 28 August 2012, [url](#)

³ L. Jourdan, Mayi-Mayi: Young Rebels in Kivu, DRC, 2011, [url](#)

⁴ New Humanitarian (The), DR Congo: From protection to insurgency - history of the Mayi-Mayi, 16 March 2006, [url](#)

⁵ New Humanitarian (The), DR Congo: From protection to insurgency - history of the Mayi-Mayi, 16 March 2006, [url](#)

⁶ New Humanitarian (The), DR Congo: From protection to insurgency - history of the Mayi-Mayi, 16 March 2006, [url](#)



Congolais/Congolese Patriot Resistants).⁷ According to an Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) report published in 2013, there were at least 30 different Mai-Mai militia groups operating in DRC, including the Raia Mutomboki, PARECO, and Mai Mai Simba militias.⁸ The same source reported that Mai-Mai militia acted in support of national military forces and ‘have been the most violent non-state actor in the country since the end of the Second Congo War in 2003.’⁹ ACLED also mentioned that analysing Mai-Mai militias was challenging due to the presence of multiple factions, loose organizational structures, changing alliances, and evolving leadership dynamics.¹⁰ Similarly, an academic paper describing dynamics of violence between 2003 and 2006 in DRC noted that, although they were part of a national movement, Mai-Mai factions ‘have never been unified under a single command structure’ and ‘remained a loose network of very different militias following various and often competing leaders.’¹¹ Jason Stearns, senior analyst working for the International Crisis Group, explained that due to their disorganisation, Mai-Mai groups had poor political representation and many resorted to banditry and regional conflicts, including gun-running and gold smuggling with other militias.¹² Their marginalisation from the army and government further led to their involvement in incidents like the 2004 Gatumba massacre in Burundi.¹³

2.2 Mai-Mai (Mayi Mayi) Simba

Sources described Mai-Mai Simba as the oldest Congolese armed group, established in 1964.¹⁴ According to the United Nations Security Council, the Mai-Mai Simba was led by "General" Mando Mazero and comprised between 200 and 300 combatants, and that it operated in the mineral-rich forests of Maiko Park across North Kivu, Maniema, and Orientale Provinces.¹⁵ In December 2013, the New Humanitarian reported that 400 militiamen from Mai-Mai Simba were operating under the command of a poacher named Morgan in Mambasa territory, southwest of Ituri.¹⁶

Security incidents involving Mai-Mai Simba militia, as reported by sources, include:

⁷ AI, Democratic Republic of Congo: Crisis in North Kivu, 21 November 2008, [url](#)

⁸ ACLED, Country Report: DR-Congo, December 2013, [url](#), p.5

⁹ ACLED, Country Report: DR-Congo, December 2013, [url](#), p.5

¹⁰ ACLED, Country Report: DR-Congo, December 2013, [url](#), p.5

¹¹ Autesserre S., Local Violence, National Peace? Postwar “Settlement” in the Eastern D.R. Congo (2003–2006), December 2006, [url](#), p. 28

¹² New Humanitarian (The), DR Congo: From protection to insurgency - history of the Mayi-Mayi, 16 March 2006, [url](#)

¹³ New Humanitarian (The), DR Congo: From protection to insurgency - history of the Mayi-Mayi, 16 March 2006, [url](#); For information on the Gatumba massacre see: HRW, Burundi: 15 Years On, No Justice for Gatumba Massacre, 13 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 29 November 2011 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council, 2 December 2011, [url](#), para. 246; Mercy Corps, UK Aid, USAID - US Agency for International Development, Crisis Analysis; DR Congo; Monthly Displacement Report; June 2023, 31 July 2023, [url](#), p. 28

¹⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 29 November 2011 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council, 2 December 2011, [url](#), paras. 246, 247

¹⁶ New Humanitarian (The), After North Kivu, UN, DRC forces set sights on Orientale, 13 December 2013, [url](#)



- Security incidents caused by Mai-Mai Simba were reported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in June and July 2012 in Ituri.¹⁷
- On 24 June 2012, in the village of Epulu, Province Orientale, a local militia Mai-Mai Simba reportedly committed multiple rapes and abducted several women to be used as sex slaves.¹⁸
- On 24 June 2012, the Mai-Mai Simba militia attacked and burned the headquarters of the Institute in the Congo for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN) and the nearby Okapi Conservation Project in Epulu, killing six people.¹⁹
- On 6 May 2012, the Mai-Mai Simba militia killed around 27 people and injured 60 others in an attack in the northeastern Orientale province.²⁰
- In March 2013, the UN Joint Human Rights Office in Ituri investigated the alleged commission of serious human rights violations such as rape, looting, and torture by Mai-Mai Simba militia.²¹

Corroborating information on security incidents could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints.

2.3 Congolese Rally for Democracy (Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie, RCD)

The RCD was a Rwandan-backed rebel group²² that launched a rebellion against the government of Laurent Kabila in 1998.²³ According to the International Crisis Group, RCD 'became a political party and member of the transition government (2003- 2006) under the presidency of Azarias Ruberwa.'²⁴ According to Human Rights Watch, the RCD 'vowed to restore democracy and human rights' to the DRC but instead committed massacres and extrajudicial executions, illegally detained and tortured civilians, and failed to prevent or punish crimes committed by its combatants.²⁵

¹⁷ UNOCHA, Eastern Africa: Displaced Populations Report (Issue 12, 31 March - 30 September 2012), 21 November 2013, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸ UN News, UN official condemns sexual violence in DR Congo by renegade soldiers, 18 June 2012, [url](#)

¹⁹ VOA, Suspect in Wildlife Reserve Attack Escapes, 9 August 2012, [url](#)

²⁰ AllAfrica, Rwanda: 27 Killed By Mai-Mai Simba Militia in DR Congo, 8 May 2012 [url](#); New Times (the), 27 killed by Mai-Mai Simba militia in DR Congo, 7 May 2012, [url](#)

²¹ MONUSCO, Some 369 victims of Mai-Mai Simba in Mambasa, ituri district, interviewed by UN investigators, 20 April 2013, [url](#)

²² IWPR, Many DRC Children Volunteer to Fight, 10 March 2011, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2010, May 2010, [url](#)

²³ HRW, Democratic Republic of Congo - Eastern Congo Ravaged: Killing Civilians And Silencing Protest, May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴ International Crisis Group, The Electoral Process Seen from the East, 5 September 2011, [url](#), p. 14

²⁵ HRW, Democratic Republic of Congo - Eastern Congo Ravaged: Killing Civilians And Silencing Protest, May 2020, [url](#)



Militia groups supporting the Kabila government such as the Mai-Mai were in active conflict with the RCD.²⁶ After peace negotiations between the DRC government and RCD took place, the RCD split: Its founder, Jean-Pierre Bemba, left to found the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (Mouvement de Liberation du Congo, MLC) and moved to the Equateur province,²⁷ while the other faction was based in Goma (RCD-Goma) and led by Emile Ilunga,²⁸ who had control over parts of South Kivu, Maniema, North Kivu, Orientale, and Katanga.²⁹ RCD-Goma established an administration with various departments, each headed by an official, and had appointed governors and other officials.³⁰ Although it did not refer to itself as a ‘government’, RCD-Goma claimed to be administering South Kivu, Maniema, North Kivu, Orientale, and Katanga in accordance with Congolese law.³¹

2.4 Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (Forces Democratiques de Liberation du Rwanda, FDLR)

FDLR is an armed group formed by Rwandan Hutus³² and defined by United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the (MONUSCO) as ‘the largest illegal foreign armed group operating in the DR Congo.’³³ FDLR operated in eastern DRC³⁴ and Katanga province with about 2 000 combatants.³⁵ According to the International Criminal Court, FDLR consists of former members of the Rwandan Armed Forces (Forces Armées Rwandaises), also known as ‘ex-FAR’, and the Interahamwe militias, who were responsible for the Rwandan genocide.³⁶ They fled Rwanda and settled in the Kivu Provinces in the eastern part of Zaire.³⁷ According to the United Nations Security Council, the group ‘has committed serious violations of international law involving the targeting of women and children in armed conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, and forced displacement.’³⁸

Security incidents involving the FDLR militia, as reported by sources, include:

²⁶ HRW, Democratic Republic of Congo - Eastern Congo Ravaged: Killing Civilians And Silencing Protest, May 2020, [url](#)

²⁷ HRW, Democratic Republic of Congo - Eastern Congo Ravaged: Killing Civilians And Silencing Protest, May 2020, [url](#)

²⁸ HRW, Democratic Republic of Congo - Eastern Congo Ravaged: Killing Civilians And Silencing Protest, May 2020, [url](#); International Crisis Group, The Electoral Process Seen from the East, 5 September 2011, [url](#), p. 14

²⁹ HRW, Democratic Republic of Congo - Eastern Congo Ravaged: Killing Civilians And Silencing Protest, May 2020, [url](#)

³⁰ HRW, Democratic Republic of Congo - Eastern Congo Ravaged: Killing Civilians And Silencing Protest, May 2020, [url](#)

³¹ HRW, Democratic Republic of Congo - Eastern Congo Ravaged: Killing Civilians And Silencing Protest, May 2020, [url](#)

³² Security Council Report, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1 June 2024, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Time for a New Approach to Disarm the FDLR, 7 August 2009, [url](#)

³³ MONUSCO, The Foreign Armed Groups, n.d, [url](#)

³⁴ Security Council Report, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1 June 2024, [url](#); MONUSCO, The Foreign Armed Groups, n.d, [url](#)

³⁵ MONUSCO, The Foreign Armed Groups, n.d, [url](#)

³⁶ International Criminal Court, Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 3 August 2011, [url](#), p. 4

³⁷ International Criminal Court, Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 3 August 2011, [url](#), p. 4

³⁸ UN Security Council, Forces Democratiques De Liberation Du Rwanda (FDLR), 29 October 2014, [url](#)



- On 10 May 2010, the FDLR militia killed 96 civilians in Busurungi, Walikale territory, burning alive some of the victims in their homes.³⁹
- In January of 2012, HRW reported that the FLDR militia ‘attacked numerous villages in the Masisi territory, killing six civilians, raping two women, and abducting at least 48 people whose whereabouts remain unknown.’⁴⁰
- Between 31 December 2011 and 4 January 2012, the FDLR militia attacked several villages in South Kivu and killed at least 33 people, including 9 children and 6 women.⁴¹

Corroborating information on security incidents could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

2.5 March 23 Movement (M23)

The origins of the March 23 Movement trace back to the unsuccessful peace agreement signed on 23 March 2009⁴² between the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP)⁴³ and the DRC government.⁴⁴ On 6 May 2012, former CNDP members declared the creation of M23, alleging the government had not fulfilled promises of ranks, salaries, and positions from the 2009 agreement, nor properly repatriated refugees.⁴⁵ They took control of areas in North Kivu, ultimately occupying Goma for 11 days between November and December 2012, until a peace deal was reached with the government in January 2013.⁴⁶ Before the surrender of the M23, clashes among armed groups intensified in Masisi and Walikale territories, displacing up to 3 000 civilians in Walikale.⁴⁷

ACLED reported that from April 2012 to September 2013, M23 was involved in 33 conflict events, causing an average of 28 fatalities per month, with 46 % of their actions targeting civilians.⁴⁸ The M23 primarily engaged with the Congolese army and other actors, including UN forces and Mai-Mai militias.⁴⁹ In June 2012, the OHCHR stated that ‘the leaders of the M23 are among the worst perpetrators of human rights violations in the DRC or in the world,’

³⁹ AI, Annual Report: Congo (Dem. Rep. of) 2010, 19 March 2011, [url](#)

⁴⁰ HRW, Democratic Republic of Congo: Country Summary, January 2012, [url](#)

⁴¹ UN Security Council, Forces Democratiques De Liberation Du Rwanda (FDLR), 29 October 2014, [url](#)

⁴² The agreement mandated the integration of CNDP fighters into the DRC’s national security forces, recognised the CNDP as a political entity, and committed the government to repatriating Congolese Tutsi refugees from neighboring countries. Small Arms Survey, Demobilization in the DRC, April 2013, [url](#), p. 2

⁴³ The CNDP was established as an armed opposition to the central government in 2006, under the leadership of Laurent Nkunda, a Congolese of Tutsi ethnicity native to southeastern Kivu, previously in command of the rebel group known as the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), supported by Rwanda and based in Goma. CeSI, ‘instabilità del Congo orientale e il ruolo dell’M23 e delle milizie etniche, 7 January 2013, [url](#)

⁴⁴ CeSI, ‘instabilità del Congo orientale e il ruolo dell’M23 e delle milizie etniche, 7 January 2013, [url](#); HRW, DR Congo: M23 Rebels Committing War Crimes, 11 September 2012, [url](#)

⁴⁵ Small Arms Survey, Demobilization in the DRC, April 2013, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁶ Small Arms Survey, Demobilization in the DRC, April 2013, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 17 December 2013, [url](#), para. 21

⁴⁸ ACLED, Country Report: DR-Congo, December 2013, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁹ ACLED, Country Report: DR-Congo, December 2013, [url](#), p. 3



including the commission of mass rapes, massacres, and child recruitment.⁵⁰ OHCHR indicated that key M23 included General Bosco Ntaganda, wanted by the ICC for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ituri district,⁵¹ and Colonel Sultani Makenga, implicated in child recruitment and numerous massacres in eastern Congo.⁵²

Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

⁵⁰ OHCHR, Citing “appalling” human rights record of leaders of M23 mutineers in DR Congo, Pillay fears further abuses, 19 June 2012, [url](#)

⁵¹ OHCHR, Citing “appalling” human rights record of leaders of M23 mutineers in DR Congo, Pillay fears further abuses, 19 June 2012, [url](#)

⁵² OHCHR, Citing “appalling” human rights record of leaders of M23 mutineers in DR Congo, Pillay fears further abuses, 19 June 2012, [url](#); EU, Council of the EU, Council Decision (CFSP) 2015/620 of 20 April 2015 amending Decision 2010/788/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 20 April 2015, [url](#), para. 8

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