

Briefing: Armed Groups in Eastern DRC IRIN 31 October 2013 The apparent imminent demise of the 18-month-old M23 rebellion is unlikely, on its own, to deliver peace to the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where, in the absence of a significant presence of the state, at least 40 armed groups operate, and a chronic humanitarian crisis persists.

Some 2.6 million people are displaced and 6.4 million in need of emergency food aid in eastern DRC.

“The complexity of the war in eastern Congo, with its entangled web of actors pursuing a multiplicity of agendas can be overwhelming and confusing. The region is a fertile environment for the development and growth of armed groups and warlordism,” according to the [Enough Project](#).

“One of the predictors of where a new insurgency will emerge in the DRC is to look for past movements: armed groups beget armed groups, as commanders take advantage of networks of former combatants and rekindle relations with smugglers, arms dealers and miners,” says an Usalama Project [report](#).

Here is an overview of a selection of the armed groups present in eastern DRC:

M23

The [M23](#) rebel group came into existence in April 2012 when hundreds of mainly ethnic Tutsi soldiers in FARDC (the Congolese army), led by Gen Bosco Ntaganda, mutinied over poor living conditions and pay. Most of the mutineers were previously members of the pro-[Tutsi Congrès national pour la défense du peuple](#) (CNDP). In 2009 CNDP signed a deal with the government which the mutineers felt Kinshasa did not fully implement. M23 takes its name from the 23 March 2009 CNDP-DRC government [peace treaty](#).

Fighting between M23 and FARDC has displaced hundreds of thousands in North Kivu and forced tens of thousands to flee across the border to Rwanda and Uganda. Both sides have been accused of gross human rights abuses against each other and civilians, some of which amount to war crimes, according to rights groups.

In December 2012, M23 briefly occupied the North Kivu provincial capital of Goma. “Officially, M23 wants better governance, security, democratization and development of the country. Lately, they publicly demanded amnesty, military as well as political reintegration,” says the Enough Project report. According to the Enough Project, M23 troops are estimated to number 1,500. Other sources put their number at 1,700-2,000.

“An injection of fresh [UN] peacekeepers earlier this year with a stronger mandate to actively take the fight to the [M23] rebels appears to have turned the tide,” says BBC correspondent Gabriel Gatehouse. **Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR)**

The FDLR was founded by some of the key perpetrators of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, who fled across the border into eastern DRC in the wake of those massacres.

It is led by Maj-Gen Sylvestre Mudacumura, who has been indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

“FDLR suffers from internal divisions and a weak hierarchy that lacks the capability to command and control the organization’s entire operations,” says Vogel.

According to the 2013 Midterm Report by the UN Group of Experts (GoE), FDLR, estimated to be 1,500-strong, grew weaker in the first half of 2013, with the decrease in numbers attributed to a high surrender rate.

FDLR’s leadership is divided between hardliners such as Mudacumura, who wants to continue the armed struggle, and moderates from a younger generation who favour demobilization and reintegration, according to the GoE report.

The group continues to be implicated in human rights violations and the illicit exploitation of natural resources over the last 15-20 years. FDLR remains active in parts of Masisi, Walikale, Southern Lubero and Rutshuru territories. For the list and description of other rebel groups operating in the Eastern DRC, click [here](#) .