



The so called M23 rebel group has ended its bloody insurgency against the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Mary Robinson, United Nations special envoy for Africa's Great Lakes region, has joined other senior diplomatic officials in welcoming the announcement by the M23 rebel group. The conflict has, for nearly two years, exacerbated humanitarian strife in the country's restive east.

In the past year only, the fighting displaced more than 100,000 people, aggravating an ongoing humanitarian crisis in the region which includes 2.6 million internally displaced persons and 6.4 million in need of food and emergency aid.

The M23 was forced to end its rebellion by a combination of factors: concerted international pressure; an unusually competent performance by the DRC's armed forces; the robust action of

a new UN "intervention brigade" brought in to give the world's largest peacekeeping force sharper military clout and also Rwanda's apparent decision to stop its (alleged) military support for the rebels.

"The Envoys urge both parties to conclude the political process by signing a principled agreement that ensures the timely disarmament and demobilization of the M23 and accountability for perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity," the envoys' statement said, adding that the officials also welcomed the reestablishment of State authority by the Congolese Government in areas previously held by the M23.

According to Congolese government spokesman, Laurent Mende, "there is no more place in our country for any irregular group", adding that the newly defeated M23 rebels "were top of the list. They have been replaced by the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda). We are going to get on with disarming them."

While the dramatic developments marked a significant success in the Congolese government's fight against armed groups in the embattled east, experts warned that the rebel retreat would not result in an immediate peace in a region ravaged by fighting for nearly two decades.

Congo has been the scene of one of the most intractable and deadly conflicts the world has seen, claiming millions of lives in the past two decades. A string of militias, foreign armies and rebel groups have rampaged across its territory, pillaging the countryside of valuable minerals while raping and murdering the population.

*Photo: Newly-arrived refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) at the Nyakabande Transit Centre in south-west Uganda. Photo: UNHCR/L. Beck*