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Centre for Human Rights  
Faculty of Law

## PRESS STATEMENT

# URGENT HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN GOMA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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The Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria expresses profound concern over the escalating humanitarian crisis in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The recent surge in violence has resulted in significant loss of life, mass displacement, and grave human rights violations.

Since the onset of intensified hostilities and the capture of Goma by M23 troops in late January, [close to 3000 individuals have lost their lives](#), while thousands have been injured. The alarming increase in fatalities has led to the use of [mass graves](#), highlighting the severity of the situation. The conflict has also left many, including children, missing, while thousands have been forced to flee their homes. Overcrowded displacement camps – some of which have been [targeted by bombings](#) – are now struggling to provide adequate shelter, exacerbating the vulnerability of affected populations, particularly women and children.

[Disturbing reports](#) have emerged, adding to the horrors of the crisis, that female prisoners in Muzenze Prison, Goma, were subjected to sexual violence before being burned alive. These appalling acts constitute grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

The humanitarian situation is further worsened by the [overwhelming strain on medical facilities](#) in Goma. Hospitals and clinics [operate below capacity](#), struggling to care for the many injured individuals amid severe shortages of essential medical supplies and personnel. This dire situation not only hampers effective treatment but also increases the risk of preventable deaths.

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In light of these urgent concerns, the Centre for Human Rights joins the international community in calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities in Goma and the broader eastern DRC. We urge all parties to respect international humanitarian law, protect civilians, and facilitate the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid. Additionally, we call for the unconditional withdrawal of M23 forces from Goma to prevent further civilian harm.

We hope that the [outcomes of the recent summit in Tanzania](#), which brought together leaders from the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), will be fully implemented, leading to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Regional leaders must work together to restore peace and stability in the DRC and ensure accountability for the atrocities committed.

The Centre for Human Rights calls on the African Union (AU) to intensify its diplomatic efforts to mediate between the conflicting parties. The AU should also increase its support for the thousands of refugees fleeing the conflict, ensure safe passage, and provide necessary financial and logistical assistance to neighbouring countries hosting displaced populations.

UN humanitarian agencies, NGOs, and other actors must ensure that aid reaches those most in need, providing immediate relief and long-term support for displaced communities in Goma and other areas of eastern DRC. Humanitarian efforts should prioritise enhanced coordination, equitable access to resources, and support for the most vulnerable populations, including women, children, and older persons.

We urge all parties to uphold international humanitarian law, ensuring the protection of civilians, the prohibition of sexual violence, and the safe passage of humanitarian aid. Armed groups must immediately cease attacks on civilians, civilian infrastructure, and health facilities.

The Centre recommends that the United Nations Human Rights Council and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights jointly establish and deploy an independent fact-finding mission to investigate human rights and humanitarian law violations in conflict-affected areas.

Finally, peacebuilding initiatives must prioritise dialogue and a firm commitment to ending hostilities.

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