

Goma captured by M23 rebel group in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

Congolese UEM Church also threatened by fighting

(Wuppertal/Goma, 27th January 2025) After significant territorial gains in the past three weeks, the rebel group M23 took the provincial capital Goma in North Kivu in the Democratic Republic (DR) Congo in the early morning of January 27. The troops of the UN mission MONUSCO retreated to their base at Lake Kivu and ceased fire. The troops have no mandate for regular combat against the attackers. It is also reported that Burundian and South African soldiers are trying to stop the fighting, but there are said to have been threats of fighting in Bukavu and Saké.

Members of the UN mission MONUSCO had already been evacuated from the country over the weekend after several soldiers from the international peacekeeping force had been killed. The situation is currently described as confusing and extremely fragile. The humanitarian situation remains catastrophic, as many of the several hundred thousand displaced persons have fled to Goma from the surrounding areas in the last few days. Hundreds of civilians have been killed in the fighting in the last few days and weeks. According to eyewitness reports, people in the city, which has a population of over a million, are currently fearing for their lives as a result of the repeated gunfire in the city.

UEM church affected

The Goma-based "Communauté Baptiste au Centre de l'Afrique" (CBCA) Baptist church and its congregations have also been affected by the fighting. The church is a member of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) and has been providing humanitarian aid for more than half a million internally displaced persons in East Kivu for years. The UEM community has provided extensive support for this aid. In view of the current escalation in the region, the President of the Baptist Church, Rev. Dr. Jonathan Kavusa, addressed the UEM community with the following message: "We ask for prayer and solidarity with the people affected by war and violence in Goma and Eastern Kivu". According to estimates, more than 100 rebel groups are active in the region.

The national president of the "Church of Christ in Congo" (ECC), Rev. Dr. André Bokundoa, writes in a press release: "The Church of Christ in Congo is deeply concerned about the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the province of North Kivu and especially in the city of Goma." The ECC leadership is urgently calling on the country's authorities to activate an emergency plan and to ensure the protection of displaced civilians in all countries and regions. The ECC church, based in Kinshasa (DR Congo), is also part of the UEM community.

Call to the German government

Together with the Ecumenical Network Central Africa (ÖNZ), the UEM calls on the German government to urge the Rwandan government to stop supporting the rebel group M23 and to work for a peaceful solution to the conflict. "It is to be hoped that military conflicts of this enormous dimension in Africa will be noticed in Europe and also by the German government, and that concrete measures will be taken – including vis-à-vis countries such as Rwanda and other countries in the region involved – to end the war and protect the civilian population," said Dr Jochen Motte, JPIC Officer Germany at UEM and a member of the German government's Advisory Board on Civil Crisis Prevention and Peace Promotion.

The fighting between the M23 and the army of the Democratic Republic of Congo has intensified since the beginning of the year, and the rebels have been able to take more and more areas under their control. With the advance of the M23 on the city of Goma, more than 400,000 people have fled their homes, according to a UN report. On their advance, the M23 also captured the cities of Masisi and Minova. Local officials report that more than 200 civilians have been killed in the areas captured by the M23. Hundreds of injured people were treated in the hospitals of Goma. According to the United Nations, two children died when bombs fell on a displaced persons camp. Human Rights Watch warns of growing dangers for the civilian population in the fight of the Congolese army against the M23 rebels. According to the BBC, aid organizations blame both sides for serious human rights violations against the civilian population. It is feared that the countries in the region will be involved in open, heavy military fighting.

About „UEM“

The United Evangelical Mission (UEM) with offices in Wuppertal, Indonesia and Tanzania is an international, equal community of 39 members, including 32 Protestant churches in Africa and Asia as well as six Protestant churches and the v. Bodelschwingh Foundation Bethel in Germany. The UEM consistently pursues a holistic understanding of mission. This includes improving the living conditions of suffering and disadvantaged people while respecting their personal dignity and taking their cultural context into account.