

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

DRC Monthly Briefing April 2022

DRC Summary 20 April 2022

The March 23 Movement (M23) rebel group launches an incursion on two army positions in the territory of Rutshuru (North Kivu), along the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) border with Uganda and Rwanda, as the State of Siege in North Kivu and Ituri Provinces comes under increased scrutiny. President Felix Tshisekedi (2019-present) conducts a high-level meeting in Jordan at the invitation of King Abdullah II (1999-present). The meeting signifies a change in relations between the two countries, which historically took place through intermediaries. The Inspection Générale des Finances (IGF) (general inspectorate of finance) publishes an audit of DRC's timber sector highlighting rampant corruption in the sector, which places at risk a \$500m pledge for forest protection from various donors. The report finds that six consecutive ministers illegally allocated approximately 18 logging concessions and violated several laws.

Rebel group M23 re-emerges...

The **March 23 Movement (M23)** rebel group has re-emerged in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC)** north-eastern province of **North Kivu**, sparking fears of a resurgence in insecurity along the border with **Uganda** and **Rwanda** and heightening diplomatic tension between DRC and Rwanda. The group launched an incursion on 27 March on two army positions in the territory of **Rutshuru** (North Kivu) and continued to advance on nearby towns, forcing thousands to flee into Uganda.¹ The Ugandan army also reported an attack on the Ugandan side of the border, where it claimed to have killed 14 M23 rebels.²

The incursion marks a significant re-emergence of the rebel group, which underwent a process of disarmament in 2013. M23 is a group of former rebels of the **Congrès national pour la défense de la peuple (CNDP)**, made up of former members of a **Tutsi** militia group. The name came from the 23 March 2009 agreement between the CNDP and the DRC government to incorporate CNDP fighters in the **Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC)** (DRC armed forces).³ However, CNDP fighters rebelled in 2012, claiming the DRC government had not upheld the agreement, and renamed their group the March 23 (M23) Movement.⁴ The M23 revolt peaked in 2012 and 2013 when it captured large parts of North Kivu province. The M23, one of many armed rebel groups roaming eastern DRC, briefly seized North Kivu capital **Goma** before DRC troops, backed by **United Nations** peacekeepers from the **Mission de l'organisation des nations unies pour la stabilisation en RD Congo (MONUSCO)**, defeated them and drove them out of the DRC. Following its defeat, the M23 signed an agreement with **Kinshasa** that included provisions for its fighters' reintegration into civilian society. However, the group has accused the government of breaching the agreement once more, and fighting resumed in 2021.

Following the 27 March incursion, MONUSCO announced on 30 March that eight peacekeepers were killed in a helicopter crash in North Kivu on 29 March.⁵ MONUSCO has not held any party responsible for the crash. The peacekeepers were conducting a mission to assess the displacement of civilians during clashes between the FARDC and M23. Although military authorities in North Kivu claimed M23

¹ ACP Congo, 28 Mar 2022

² Reuters, 30 Mar 2022

³ DW Akademie, 8 Apr 2022

⁴ DW Akademie, 8 Apr 2022

⁵ The Citizen, 30 Mar 2022

was behind the crash, the rebel group denied responsibility.⁶ M23 announced a unilateral ceasefire on 1 April after the clashes with FARDC.⁷ Fighting resumed on 5 April and ended again when M23 announced on 10 April its withdrawal from the villages of which it had taken control.⁸

However, M23's withdrawal was not enough to end the diplomatic tensions sparked by the incursion. A spokesman for the military governor of North Kivu – which remains under a state of siege – publicly accused Rwanda on 28 March of supporting the rebel group,⁹ reigniting tensions between Rwanda and the DRC. Before M23's disarmament in 2013, the DRC government and the UN had alleged that Rwanda supported the rebel group.¹⁰ DRC's ministry of foreign affairs summoned Rwanda's ambassador to the DRC, **Vincent Karega**, to explain Rwanda's position. Karega reaffirmed that Rwanda does not support the M23, "*neither politically nor militarily*".¹¹ The DRC foreign affairs ministry later announced that it would conduct a joint fact-finding mission in North Kivu with Rwanda.¹²

Relations have greatly improved between Rwanda and DRC since President **Felix Tshisekedi** (2019-present) came to power, especially on the front of security cooperation, a significant success given their shared history.¹³ However, relations between the neighbours have declined in recent months, largely due to DRC's improving relations with Uganda, with whom Rwanda has a tense relationship.¹⁴ Rwanda has often accused Uganda of supporting rebels groups planning to destabilise the country, while Uganda has accused Rwanda of carrying out illegal espionage on its territory.¹⁵

The delicate balance of diplomacy remains in Tshisekedi's hands; however, with the DRC's recent admission to the **East African Community (EAC)** (see *ARC Briefing DRC Feb 2022*), he will be hoping to maintain regional cooperation and not disrupt relations with either country.¹⁶ In addition to highlighting the fragile regional relations, M23 has created an additional challenge in the east of the country, adding to an already overwhelming security situation.

... as State of Siege comes under fire

The **State of Siege** in the provinces of North Kivu and **Ituri**, initially declared on 3 May 2021, has come under increased scrutiny in the past month. MONUSCO deputy force commander Major General **Benoit Chavanat** announced during a press conference on 23 March organised by the UN that the security situation in DRC's north-eastern provinces is not improving,¹⁷ **Switzerland** based NGO **Médecins Sans Frontières** echoed this sentiment, stating it would leave areas of Ituri due to an increase in violent attacks, two of which had targetted its staff.¹⁸

An attack carried out by the **Co-operative for the Development of Congo (CODECO)** on 23 March in **Djugu** territory (Ituri) also highlighted the rising death toll in Ituri province despite the state of siege.¹⁹ More than 100 people died in attacks carried out by CODECO between 1 February and 24 March.²⁰ Tshisekedi ordered a change in the chain of command in North Kivu after the M23 incursion

⁶ AFP, 2 Apr 2022

⁷ Reuters, 1 Apr 2022

⁸ Actualite, 11 Apr 2022

⁹ Jeune Afrique, 31 Mar 2022

¹⁰ BBC News, 20 Nov 2012

¹¹ Jeune Afrique, 31 Mar 2022

¹² Voice of Congo, 5 Apr 2022

¹³ Jeune Afrique, 31 Mar 2022

¹⁴ Jeune Afrique, 31 Mar 2022

¹⁵ Reuters, 28 Jan 2022

¹⁶ ARC DRC analyst

¹⁷ Actualite, 24 Mar 2022

¹⁸ RFI, 22 Mar 2022

¹⁹ Actualite, 24 Mar 2022

²⁰ Actualite, 24 Mar 2022

launched on 27 March²¹ and extended the state of siege – yet again – on 5 April for 15 days, despite the concerns raised about its lack of success.²²

There has been increased international attention on those who oppose the state of siege. **United Kingdom (UK)**-based NGO **Amnesty International** has condemned the sentencing on 1 April of 13 activists to one year in prison for protesting the state of siege in November 2021.²³ Amnesty International deputy director for **East Africa**, the **Horn of Africa** and the **Great Lakes Region**, **Flavia Mwangovya**, described the conviction of the 13 activists, “solely for exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly” as “yet another outrageous and shameful attempt to root out dissent in the DRC”.²⁴

During a session of the national assembly on 18 April, North Kivu and Ituri deputies demanded that the state of siege be ended and announced their decision to no longer participate in meetings until their request is met.²⁵ Despite their protests, the senate extended the state of siege yet again after the deputies had left the meeting.²⁶

However, some members of Tshisekedi’s government appear to be acknowledging the lack of progress in the past 11 months. During the National Assembly session on 19 April, five deputies initiated and tabled a bill to end the state of siege.²⁷ The deputies noted that the state of siege is “an exceptional situation and not a mode of permanent management”.

DRC and Jordan strengthen bilateral cooperation

President Felix Tshisekedi conducted a high-level meeting in **Jordan** on 23 March, at the invitation of **King Abdullah II** (1999-present). The meeting signifies a change in relations between the two countries, which have historically taken place through intermediaries.²⁸ Topics of discussion are said to have revolved around security, military cooperation, infrastructure, the agro-industry, renewable energies, and mining. Jordan has already supplied soldiers to support MONUSCO. The two countries committed to settling the legal aspects of the new bilateral cooperation.²⁹ King Abdullah has also committed to sponsoring two economic missions for DRC.³⁰

The visit coincided with a mini-summit organised by King Abdullah where other **African** leaders joined Tshisekedi. These included Rwanda’s President **Paul Kagame** (2000-present), **Mozambique**’s President **Filipe Nyusi** (2015-present) and **Tanzania**’s prime minister, **Kassim Majaliwa**.³¹ Representatives from the **United States (US)**, **France**, **Belgium**, **Australia**, and **Italy** were also present.³²

Illegal logging exposed...

The **Inspection Générale des Finances (IGF)** (general inspectorate of finance) has published an audit of DRC’s timber sector highlighting the rampant corruption in the sector and placing at risk a \$500m pledge for forest protection from various donors. The report, published on 1 April, found that six consecutive ministers illegally allocated approximately 18 logging concessions and violated several laws.³³ The report also alleges that the government has failed to recover at least \$3m in royalties from logging operators, due to a lack of enforcement of the tax regime. The IGF reports that

²¹ ACP Congo, 3 Apr 2022

²² ACP Congo, 5 Apr 2022

²³ RFI, 6 Apr 2022

²⁴ RFI, 6 Apr 2022

²⁵ Voice of Congo, 19 Apr 2022

²⁶ Actualite, 19 Apr 2022

²⁷ Actualite, 19 Apr 2022

²⁸ ACP Congo, 23 Mar 2022

²⁹ Voice of Congo, 24 Mar 2022

³⁰ ACP Congo, 24 Mar 2022

³¹ ACP Congo, 23 Mar 2022

³² ACP Congo, 24 Mar 2022

³³ Africa24, 7 Apr 2022

the government has failed to implement the guidelines outlined in DRC's forest code, first introduced in 2002.³⁴

The findings of the report may risk a \$500m pledge for forest protection, made during the 2021 **United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26)** by **United Kingdom (UK)** prime minister **Boris Johnson** (2019-present). The agreement was signed by Johnson on behalf of the **Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI)**, through which several **European** countries, among other donors, assist countries such as DRC achieve climate change goals. As home to the second-largest rainforest in the world, the DRC absorbs approximately 4% of the world's annual carbon emissions,³⁵ making it a focal point of goals related to the **2015 Paris Agreement** on climate change. The funding was released on several conditionalities, one of which was the publication of the IGF report before the end of 2021.³⁶ Although the IGF finalised its audit in May 2021, it had not published it publicly until now.³⁷ Online Europe-headquartered media platform **Modern Diplomacy** claims that pressure from **Netherlands**-based independent environmental campaigning organisation **Greenpeace** led to the eventual publication of the report.³⁸

Environmental groups have voiced concerns, following the report's findings, that "*taxpayer money from the UK, Norway, France and Germany could go to waste*".³⁹ CAFI has not released any statement regarding the findings of the report, only acknowledging its receipt. The DRC government has announced no action, legal or otherwise, since the release of the report.

Planner

6 May 2022 **(DRC)** Rescheduled provincial elections;

20 Dec 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** End date of peacekeeping mission **Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO)**;

2023 **(DRC)** Scheduled presidential and parliamentary elections

Chronology

19 Apr 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *ACP Congo*. Finance ministry announces that government has borrowed 26 billion FCFA (\$13m) from **Banque centrale du Congo** through the issuance of treasury bonds;

19 Apr 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualite*. Oil operators express concern over the adjusted fuel prices set by the government, claiming they are too low and that they fail to take into account the "*realities of the Russia-Ukraine conflict*", warning fuel prices will have to increase;

18 Apr 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Congo Independent*. Local media outlet **Congo Independent** reports that hydrocarbons minister **Didier Budimbu** was arrested on 12 April and subsequently released on 14 April with no additional actions taken;

17 Apr 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualite*. **Russia's** ambassador to the DRC, **Alexey Sentebov**, invites DRC **Senate** president **Modeste Bahati Lukwebo** to attend the **International Economic Forum** to be held in **Saint Petersburg** (Russia);

14 Apr 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Congo Independent*. The debate on the reform of the electoral law will continue on 20 April in the **Assemblée Nationale** (national assembly);

10 Apr 2022 **Nairobi (Kenya)** *ACP Congo*. President **Félix Tshisekedi** conducts an official visit to **Kenya** to presidential candidate **Raila Odinga**;

³⁴ Climatechangenews.com, 7 Apr 2022

³⁵ The Guardian, 18 Apr 2022

³⁶ Climatechangenews.com, 7 Apr 2022

³⁷ Africa 24, 7 Apr 2022

³⁸ Modern Diplomacy, 3 Apr 2022

³⁹ The Guardian, 18 Apr 2022

- 9 Apr 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *The East African*. The **East African Community (EAC)** secretary general has given DRC five months to undertake internal processes of ratifying the EAC treaty;
- 8 Apr 2022 **Nairobi (Kenya)** *Africanews*. President **Félix Tshisekedi** signs the **East African Community** treaty, officially joining the bloc;
- 7 Apr 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Jeune Afrique*. President **Félix Tshisekedi** grants **Belgium**-born actor **Jean-Claude van Damme** a diplomatic passport, appointing him an “ambassador”;
- 7 Apr 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Voice of Congo*. Oil operators ask the government to pay for their losses incurred in the first quarter of 2022, largely due to fuel shortages;
- 7 Apr 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualite*. Hydrocarbons minister **Didier Budimbu** will launch calls for tenders for 16 oil blocks and three gas blocks;
- 7 Apr 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualite*. Government announces plans to stop subsidising mining companies, in response to the crisis in the hydrocarbons sector;
- 6 Apr 2022 **Lubumbashi (DRC)** *Actualite*. Police arrest 30 people after **Union nationale des Fédéralistes du Congo** (national union of federalists of Congo) members hold demonstrations and loot stores;
- 4 Apr 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Reuters*. **Banque centrale du Congo** keeps its prime interest rate at 7.5%, despite rising food and fuel prices;
- 31 Mar 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *ACP Congo*. **Democratic Republic of the Congo** and the **Republic of Congo** sign a military and technical cooperation agreement,
- 30 Mar 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Reuters*. Parliament votes economy minister **Jean-Marie Kalumba** out of his post;
- 30 Mar 2022 **Ituri (DRC)** *ACP Congo*. **Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC)** (armed forces of the DRC) members present four senior FARDC officers to the military governor of **Ituri** for allegedly trafficking weapons and munitions of war;
- 29 Mar 2022 **Arusha (Tanzania)** *Actualite*. President **Felix Tshisekedi** will attend the **19th Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State** of the **East African Community** where DRC’s admission will be reviewed;
- 27 Mar 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *ACP Congo*. A delegation from the **United Nations** is visiting DRC to assess the electoral process ahead of the 2023 presidential elections;
- 23 Mar 2022 **North Kivu (DRC)** *Actualite*. **North Kivu Province** deputy **Promesse Matofali** asks President **Felix Tshisekedi** to provide the civilian populations in **Beni** (North Kivu), **Mambasa**, **Irumu** and **Djugu (Ituri)** with weapons to protect themselves against armed groups **Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)** and the **Co-operative for the Development of Congo (CODECO)**;
- 22 Mar 2022 **Ituri & North Kivu (DRC)** *Actualite*. **Human Rights Watch** says it has documented more than 20 cases of arbitrary arrests, intimidation and beatings in **Ituri** and **North Kivu** since September 2021;
- 22 Mar 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Voice of Congo*. A total of 70 **Assemblée Nationale** (national assembly) deputies sign and table a motion of no confidence against national economy minister **Jean-Marie Kalumba**, alleging that he has failed to deliver on promises he made to citizens;
- 21 Mar 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *ACP Congo*. President **Felix Tshisekedi** signs an order appointing **Christian Ndongala**, current diplomatic chief in **Belgium**, as extraordinary ambassador to the **European Union** and head of the mission to the **European Atomic Energy Communities**;
- 21 Mar 2022 **Dubai (United Arab Emirates)** *ACP Congo*. President **Felix Tshisekedi** travels to **Dubai** to attend the **DRC National Day** at the **Dubai Expo 2020**;



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