

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### DRC Monthly Briefing January 2025

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#### DRC Summary 21 January 2025

*Rwanda's President Paul Kagame (2000-present) dismisses a United Nations (UN) experts report that claims Rwanda is supporting M23 rebels in eastern DRC. Chinese mining giant Zijin Mining Group announces on 7 January that it plans to start producing lithium in the DRC in first quarter of 2026 from one of the world's largest deposits of the key battery metal. Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) representatives confirm on 19 December that a mystery flu-like illness, that raised fears of a new mpox pathogen, is a mix of diseases common in the Central African region.*

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#### Kagame dismisses UN report linking Rwanda to M23...

Rwanda's President **Paul Kagame** (2000-present) has once again denied that Rwanda has anything to do with the **M23** rebels operating in the eastern DRC's mineral-rich territories.<sup>1</sup> Kagame was responding to an interim report published on 8 January by a **United Nations (UN)** group of experts, dismissing its findings that Rwandan soldiers were helping M23 seize mines and territory in the DRC.<sup>2</sup> While speaking to reporters in **Kigali** (Rwanda), Kagame said that rebels fighting in the DRC "*did not come from Rwanda*", with most of them, including M23 leaders, coming from **Uganda**.<sup>3</sup> He further emphasised that "*it just doesn't make sense*" to blame Rwanda for the instability in the DRC and it will not resolve the challenges the region is facing.<sup>4</sup>

In its report, presented to the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**, UN experts detailed how the M23 has captured Congolese towns with the assistance of neighbouring Rwanda and has established parallel government administrations to control key mines and trade routes since April 2024.<sup>5</sup> UN experts also noted that despite a ceasefire agreement reached between the DRC and Rwanda last year, the conflict continues with the M23's object being territorial expansion and long-term occupation and exploration of these territories.<sup>6</sup>

UN experts reported in July 2024 that between 3,000 and 4,000 **Rwanda Defence Force (RDF)** soldiers were deployed in the eastern DRC, adding that each M23 unit is supervised and supported by RDF special forces (*see ARC Briefing DRC Jul 2024*). However, Kagame further questioned the UN experts' integrity and motives and accused them of ignoring violations committed by **Forces armées da la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC)** (DRC armed forces), Congolese police and other groups:

*"The whole thing has shifted from what the problem really is to some other imaginary problem they have created".<sup>7</sup>*

The UN report also revealed that the RDF and M23 were using jamming equipment to prevent military and surveillance drones from flying over territory they have captured.<sup>8</sup> In response to this, the **United States (US)** state department insisted that Rwanda stop using this GPS jamming

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<sup>1</sup> Bloomberg, 9 Jan 2025

<sup>2</sup> Anadolu Agency, 10 Jan 2025

<sup>3</sup> Rwanda Dispatch, 17 Jan 2025

<sup>4</sup> Anadolu Agency, 10 Jan 2025;

<sup>5</sup> Bloomberg, 9 Jan 2025

<sup>6</sup> UN Experts Interim Report, 8 Jan 2025

<sup>7</sup> Bloomberg, 9 Jan 2025

<sup>8</sup> Bloomberg, 15 Jan 2025

equipment, as millions of displaced Congolese are awaiting aid.<sup>9</sup> The department said in a statement on 15 January that the jamming of GPS, also referred to as spoofing, is hindering UN peacekeeping and humanitarian aircraft from flying aircraft into the region.<sup>10</sup> Spoofing involves sending signals to a GPS receiver to mislead it about its true location. The UN noted that such actions jeopardise the safety of UN and humanitarian personnel while hindering the delivery of vital relief to civilians affected by the associated violence.<sup>11</sup> The US also echoed the UN experts report that thousands of Rwandan forces are supporting M23 rebels in the eastern DRC.

The UN has long accused Rwanda and Uganda of backing M23 rebels but Rwanda has not faced significant sanctions for its support of the rebels. Comments a local expert shared with **Africa Risk Consulting Briefing (ARC Briefing)** in July are still valid:

*“[the latest UN report] confirms what we already knew but what will the UN do about it? Because until now we have never seen any punitive actions on Rwanda”.*<sup>12</sup>

Prior to the report’s publication, President **Felix Tshisekedi** (2018-present) confirmed on 15 December that peace talks with Rwanda, that were scheduled to begin that day in **Angola**, had unexpectedly been cancelled after the Rwandese delegation refused to take part in the meeting and demanded that the DRC negotiate directly with the M23.<sup>13</sup> DRC’s government spokesman **Patrick Muyaya** accused Rwanda of negotiating “*in bad faith*” while Rwanda’s government said that with no consensus on the M23 matter, further negotiations on the day “*would not have resulted in an agreement*”.<sup>14</sup> The Rwanda government also said that it remains open to participating in talks:

*“That would adopt a serious and concrete path to resolve these remaining questions once and for all”.*<sup>15</sup>

The summit, which was to have been led by Angolan President **João Lourenço** (2017-present), aimed to address the insurgency in eastern DRC.<sup>16</sup> Tensions initially escalated in early 2024 as the M23 expanded its territory near **Goma (North Kivu)**, seizing key trade routes, including those critical for exporting tantalum, a mineral vital for electronics. Heavy fighting between the rebels and FARDC persists and the rebels on 19 January seized control of the mining town of **Lumbishi (South Kivu Province)**.<sup>17</sup> The conflict remains a major challenge for government, claiming thousands of lives, and straining government finances as increased defence spending has diverted resources from critical priority areas.

### China’s Zijin to start lithium mining in DRC from 2026...

**Chinese** mining giant **Zijin Mining Group** announced on 7 January that it plans to start producing lithium from its **Manono Project** in DRC in the first quarter of 2026, which would mark operations at the first lithium mine in DRC. The deposit is reported to be one of the world’s largest deposits of the key battery metal and has an average grade of 1.51% lithium oxide.<sup>18</sup>

Zijin has begun ramping up operations at the project site in southeastern Congo, but it remains under dispute with **Australian** mining company, **AVZ Minerals Ltd.**<sup>19</sup> AVZ Minerals has launched arbitration against the government in an effort to reclaim its exploration license for the site.<sup>20</sup> Zijin, which also has lithium, gold, copper and zinc mines in five continents, is developing the Manono project in a joint venture with the government and had a full mining license granted four months ago.

<sup>9</sup> US State Department, 15 Jan 2025

<sup>10</sup> US State Department, 15 Jan 2025

<sup>11</sup> US State Department, 15 Jan 2025

<sup>12</sup> Source, local expert, Kinshasa

<sup>13</sup> X, 15 Dec 2024

<sup>14</sup> Bloomberg, 15 Dec 2024

<sup>15</sup> Bloomberg, 15 Dec 2024

<sup>16</sup> AP News, 15 Dec 2024

<sup>17</sup> Jeune Afrique, 19 Jan 2025

<sup>18</sup> South China Morning Post, 7 Jan 2025

<sup>19</sup> Mining Weekly, 7 Jan 2025

<sup>20</sup> Bloomberg, 7 Jan 2025

Chinese mining firms, including Zijin, are making significant investments in Africa's lithium resources, from the DRC to **Mali** and **Zimbabwe**, despite prices having dropped nearly 90% from their 2022 peak.<sup>21</sup> These companies are aiming to secure supply for domestic refineries, anticipating a sharp rise in future demand for the metal.<sup>22</sup> Zijin said in September 2024 that while the current oversupply is expected to persist in the short term, there remains "*room for demand from the global new energy vehicle and energy storage industries*" over the long term.<sup>23</sup>

The opening of the DRC's first lithium mine by Zijin in 2026 marks a key milestone in diversifying the country's mining sector beyond its established dominance in copper and cobalt production. The DRC's entry into lithium mining, spearheaded by Zijin, is also a strategic step that reinforces its position as a key hub for battery minerals.

### Mystery disease in DRC is mix of illnesses ...

**Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC)** head of incident management for the mpox outbreak **Ngashi Ngongo** reported in a briefing on 19 December that a mystery flu-like illness, which = had raised fears of a new mpox pathogen, is a mix of diseases common in the Central African region.<sup>24</sup> Health authorities established two working theories on the mystery disease, dubbed 'Disease X' – either that it could be severe malaria or a viral infection, both against a background of malnutrition.<sup>25</sup> By 19 December, the illness had killed more than 100 and infected at least 500 people since October, with the bulk of cases being children under five years who were suffering from malnutrition.<sup>26</sup> A high case fatality rate of 6.2% sparked fears that what was unfolding was more than typical diseases for that region.<sup>27</sup>

Although the illness was first detected in late October, the government was only alerted to it on 1 December.<sup>28</sup> The nearly six-week delay was due the DRC's undeveloped healthcare system, which has limited capacity for rapid illness diagnosis while serving a population of over 100 million.<sup>29</sup> The outbreak occurred in the remote southwestern **Panzi** zone in **Kwango Province**, hundreds of kilometres from the nearest laboratory, where the 48-hour drive from **Kinshasa** reduces the risk of wider disease spread but complicates efforts to trace its origin and cause.<sup>30</sup> To further complicate matters for the DRC, the outbreak came as the country continues to battle an mpox epidemic, which has resulted in more than 47,000 suspected cases and more than 1,000 reported deaths.<sup>31</sup>

Despite these challenges, health authorities in the DRC are highly experienced in managing infectious diseases and operating in difficult environments, expertise they have refined over several years of addressing various health crises.<sup>32</sup> However, the DRC is still struggling to access sufficient medical supplies to treat the infected and prolonged health outbreaks might impact economic activity and erode the fiscal metrics of the country.<sup>33</sup>

### Planner

2025 **(DRC)** Constitution review process to start;

Jan 2025 **Washington D.C. (United States)** **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** executives expected to approve new DRC loan programme;

<sup>21</sup> South China Morning Post, 7 Jan 2025

<sup>22</sup> South China Morning Post, 7 Jan 2025

<sup>23</sup> Mining Weekly, 7 Jan 2025

<sup>24</sup> Africa CDC, 19 Dec 2025

<sup>25</sup> Africa CDC, 19 Dec 2025

<sup>26</sup> Moneyweb, 19 Dec 2025

<sup>27</sup> Moneyweb, 19 Dec 2025

<sup>28</sup> WHO, 9 Dec 2024

<sup>29</sup> Bloomberg, 10 Dec 2024

<sup>30</sup> RFI, 5 Dec 2024

<sup>31</sup> RFI, 5 Dec 2024

<sup>32</sup> Bloomberg, 10 Dec 2024

<sup>33</sup> Fitch Ratings, 28 Aug 2024

Dec 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** End date of the **Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC)** peacekeeping mission;

## Chronology

20 Jan 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualite*. Justice minister **Constant Mutamba** announces a judicial investigation into the management of **Central Bank of Congo (BCC)** and state-owned **Gécamines** after a report identified that at least \$315m was embezzled from Gécamines between 2012 and 2020;

19 Jan 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Jeune Afrique*. Residents report that **M23** rebels have seized control of the mining town **Lumbishi (South Kivu Province)**;

16 Jan 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Radio Okapi*. President **Felix Tshisekedi** nominates new leaders for the constitutional court and council of state, including **Moke Mayele** as attorney general of the constitutional court;

15 Jan 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Freight News*. Easing of restrictions on trucks crossing into DRC has reduced traffic at border crossings between DRC and **Zambia**, with the 56km queue decreasing to 13 km;

14 Jan 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Telecom Review Africa*. **France**-headquartered **Orange** and **South Africa**-headquartered **Vodacom** form a partnership to create Build, Own, Operate (BOO) solar-powered mobile base stations across rural DRC to extend coverage in less densely populated areas;

13 Jan 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Al Jazeera*. **Forces armées da la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC)** (DRC armed forces) reports it has recaptured several towns that fell to armed groups in eastern DRC including **Ngungu**, located near **North Kivu** provincial capital **Goma**;

9 Jan 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Barrons*. Hundreds protest against illegal mining in eastern DRC where authorities are investigating claims of illicit **Chinese** mining as **South Kivu** governor **Jean-Jacques Purusi** announces the arrest of three Chinese nationals who had large sums of cash and gold bars in their possession;

8 Jan 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Bloomberg*. **United Nations** experts said that the **Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)**, an Islamist militia with links to the **Islamic State**, killed more than 650 civilians in DRC between June and early November, one of the deadliest campaigns by the group on record;

6 Jan 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *AFP*. **United States (US)** condemns what it calls “brazen ceasefire violations” by **M23** rebels in eastern DRC after they seized the key town of **Masisi (North Kivu Province)**;

5 Jan 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Jeune Afrique*. Officials confirm that **M23** rebels have seized **Masisi (North Kivu Province)**, located approximately 80km from the provincial capital – **Goma**;

1 Jan 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Reuters*. A military tribunal sentences 13 soldiers to death on charges including murder, looting, and cowardice, with military authorities calling the sentencing part of a drive to improve army discipline after territorial losses due to soldiers fleeing;

27 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *SABC News*. **United States**-headquartered **Apple** says it has suspended the purchase of minerals whose source can be traced to the DRC;

23 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *APA News*. President **Felix Tshisekedi** visits **Burundi** to meet with President **Évariste Ndayishimiye** and discuss bilateral cooperation and regional security issues;

19 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Engineering News*. **African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank)** signs a project preparation facility financing agreement for an up to 200 MW

private-sector, reservoir-based hydropower project to be located along the **Lufira River (Haut-Katanga Province)**;

18 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Africanews*. Civil society movements and opposition parties launch an awareness campaign called **Patriotes Engagés** against a planned constitutional amendment;

17 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Reuters*. DRC files criminal complaints against **United States**-headquartered **Apple**'s subsidiaries in **France** and **Belgium**, accusing them of using conflict minerals in its supply chain;

16 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *France24*. Local and military sources report the army has lost control of **Matembe (North Kivu Province)**, located close to key commercial hub **Butembo**, to **M23** rebels;

15 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *SABC News*. The peace summit between DRC and **Rwanda**, set to take place in **Angola**, is cancelled at the last minute as both sides refuse to negotiate on certain requests;

13 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Punch*. President **Félix Tshisekedi** and **Rwanda**'s President **Paul Kagame** are set to meet in **Angola** on the 15 December to discuss the ongoing conflict with the **M23** rebel group in eastern DRC;

### About Africa Risk Consulting:

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