



## **Uganda – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 23 April 2015**

### **Information on the prevalence/position of M23 in Uganda in 2014/2015. Do they pose a threat even after their defeat?**

An Associated Press report on former members of M23 who are now in Uganda states:

“The civilian head of Congo's vanquished M23 rebel movement says hundreds of rebels are stuck in Uganda as they await confirmation of amnesty from Congo's government. Rene Abandi said Thursday that he expects Congo to ‘widen’ the list of those under consideration for amnesty, one of the sticking points between both sides before they signed a peace deal late last year. More than 600 M23 rebels - including their U.N.-sanctioned commander, Sultani Makenga - fled to Uganda last year after facing military pressure from Congolese and U.N. forces.” (Associated Press (24 April 2014) *Hundreds of Congolese M23 rebels stuck in Uganda*)

A report from Radio France Internationale states:

“Last year, on a day like this, 5 November 2013, the Congolese Armed Forces, aided by the United Nations Mission in Congo - Monusco - put an end to M23 [23 March] rebels. At the time, the rebel movement was occupying a large part of North-Kivu province for a period of about one and a half years. After their defeat, a majority of the former rebels sought refuge in Uganda and neighbouring Rwanda, the two countries that have often been accused of funding the rebellion. After their defeat, and in accordance with the Nairobi Conventions, a section of the rebels was given amnesty by the DRC government. However, the process of disarmament, according to international experts sometimes crucial to peace in any country has taken a lot of time. Some observers have also not excluded the possibility of the group rearming and reorganising itself. Florence Maurice reports. [Reporter Maurice] M23 was repelled but not disarmed, says Thierry Coulon, [phonetic]. As a result, the movement can rearm itself with its Ugandan and Rwandan brothers. On several occasions, in the past week, civil society representatives in North Kivu had warned of a possible remobilisation of M23 rebels. Monusco says these are just rumours but they have promised to stay vigilant. This information is false" said M23 leader Bertrand Bisimwa, who accused Kinshasa of not honouring the commitments that it pledged in December 2013 in Nairobi.” (Radio France Internationale (5 November 2014) *Observers say former DR Congo rebels could reorganise, rearm*)

An Associated Press report on the situation for former M23 rebels who fled to Uganda states:

“Hundreds of M23 rebels fled to Uganda and Rwanda late last year amid a U.N.-backed Congolese military offensive in eastern Congo, where the rebels

once controlled vast swaths of territory. Congo's government and the rebels signed a peace agreement in December 2013 that urged the repatriation of all fighters by the end of 2014. That deadline is likely to be missed, with the rebels insisting the conditions are not right for their return amid a resurgence of violence in eastern Congo, where many armed groups have often competed for control of mineral-rich land. M23, which was widely believed to be backed by Rwanda, was made up of hundreds of soldiers who deserted the Congolese army in April 2012 after accusing the government of failing to honor the terms of an earlier deal that incorporated them into the national army. M23 has recently warned of a possible return to serious violence unless the Kinshasa government steps up security in the country's lawless east." (Associated Press Online (8 December 2014) *Congo rebels not ready to return from Uganda*)

An article from the Ugandan newspaper Daily Monitor states:

"There has been fear that hundreds of the M23 rebels currently camped at Bihanga military training school in Ibanda district could resume fighting because of the slow process to repatriate them. The M23 Chairman, Mr Bertrand Bisimwa said in a statement that they are not convinced that the Congolese government is ready to take them back home. Mr Bisimwa also accuses Congolese government of renegading on the Nairobi Agreement signed in December last year, which provides for return of Congolese refugees in Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi." (Daily Monitor (10 December 2014) *Government to repatriate hundreds of M23 rebels in Uganda*)

An Agence France Presse report states:

"The rebels' 18-month war, during which they briefly seized the key town of Goma, capital of mineral rich North Kivu province, was brought to an end a year ago by government troops and UN peacekeepers, with fighters fleeing into neighbouring Uganda and Rwanda. But top international envoys -- including from the African Union, European Union, United Nations and US -- warned in a statement they 'note with concern that while important steps have been made, the overall implementation of the Nairobi declarations remains slow.' With their fighters disarmed and held under guard in camps in Uganda and Rwanda the M23 now hold little influence on the ground. However, M23 leaders have warned they would fight again should agreements fail." (Agence France Presse (13 December 2014) *Slow progress in DR Congo's M23 rebel deal risking peace: envoys*)

An Agence France Presse report on the escape of former M23 members from Bihanga camp in December 2014 states:

"About 1,000 former fighters from a Democratic Republic of Congo rebel group broke out Tuesday from a camp in Uganda where they were being held as soldiers were trying to repatriate them, the Ugandan army said. 'A thousand rebels from the M23 (group) have escaped' from the camp in Bihanga, about 300 kilometres (190 miles) southwest of the Ugandan capital Kampala, a spokesman for the Ugandan army said on the official Twitter account. 'They said they were worried about their safety if they were sent back to the Democratic Republic of Congo.' Several of the ex-rebels were wounded by gunshots after those in the camp refused to board army trucks sent in before dawn to take them to the airport, according to M23 chief

Bertrand Bisimwa.” (Agence France Presse (16 December 2014) *M23 ex-rebels break out of Uganda camp*)

See also Voice of America News Report which states:

“Earlier in the day, Bertrand Bisimwa, civilian head of M23, said the fighters had fled as trucks arrived at the Bihanga military camp to take them to an airbase, where they would be airlifted to the DRC. He said some of the fighters had been shot and wounded during their escape. A number of M23 fighters ended up in Uganda last year after the Congolese army drove the rebels from their strongholds in Congo's North Kivu province. The DRC has promised amnesty to fighters who agree not to take part in future insurrections. But Bisimwa said the M23 fighters would face prosecution or be killed if they returned to Congo because they have no protection there.” (Voice of America News (16 December 2014) *Nearly 1,000 Congolese Rebels Escape From Camp in Uganda*)

A report from then Rwanda News Agency states:

“The former DR Congo rebel group M23 has denounced the forced repatriation of its combatants now sheltered at the Bihanga Camp in Uganda following their November 2013 defeat in the offensive carried out by Congolese and UN forces. ‘This process, which has trampled on the promises made in Nairobi on 12 December 2013 and guaranteed by the ICGLR [International Conference on the Great Lakes Region], is a violation of international law’, M23 leader Bertrand Bisimwa said. [Passage omitted] Several ex-M23 combatants were injured yesterday by bullets fired by Ugandan troops. Army trucks landed at the Bihanga camp to forcibly ship out the 1,300 ex-combatants to the Entebbe airport where Congolese government planes awaited to fly them to DR Congo. ‘They refused to board the trucks. Gunshots were fired from the Ugandan side. Military reinforcements were then deployed to the Bihanga camp to restore order and track down certain ex-rebel officials, who the Ugandan army accused of inciting the refusal to board the trucks’, Bisimwa stressed.” (Rwanda News Agency (17 December 2014) *Ex-DR Congo rebels say fired at by Ugandan troops in "forced" expatriation bid*)

An IHS Global Insight report states:

“At least 1,000 combatants belonging to Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)-based rebel group the Mouvement 23 Mars (M23) escaped from Ugandan military custody on Tuesday (16 December) after attempts to repatriate them. The repatriation attempts by Uganda were being made in accordance with the December 2013 peace deal between the Congolese rebels and the DRC government. The deal outlined that Congolese refugees and M23 rebels would be repatriated from surrounding countries, including Uganda and Burundi, within a year of the agreement and that M23 combatants would be granted amnesty. However, a Ugandan military spokesperson confirmed that all but 120 of the 1,373 former fighters had fled from the Bihanga barracks in Uganda's western Ibanda district. A majority of former combatants are resisting their 'forced repatriation' due to fears of persecution by DRC authorities. In November, M23 president Bertrand Bisimwa threatened to resume hostilities if the DRC government did not uphold the peace deal, particularly the return of Congolese refugees and

amnesty for all M23 fighters. The M23 rebels originally fled to Uganda and also neighbouring Rwanda after being defeated by the DRC army and the UN stabilisation mission (Mission de l'ONU pour la Stabilisation de la RDC: MONUSCO) in October 2013.” (IHS Global Insight (18 December 2014) *Departure of Congolese rebels from Ugandan camps raises risks of renewed M23 rebellion in eastern DRC*)

An article from the Ugandan newspaper Red Pepper states:

“UPDF spokesperson Paddy Ankunda said that some rebels had fled to Rwamwanja refugee camp where they reported to the UN that they don't want to be repatriated. The rebels had earlier on expressed concern over the manner in which their amnesty has been handled. M23 sources revealed that they were unhappy that some of their members had been killed under unclear circumstances following their return to DR Congo for amnesty. They named Bonane Rwamakuba Gahene, who was the head of the Bweza arm of the rebel group whom they allege was beheaded on 28th September at Rubare by DRC army officials and Felix Shamba, an administrator who was killed under unclear circumstances on October 19th at his home in Rutshuru. The alleged wipe out of the leaders of the M23 movement has been heavily denied by the government in Kinshasa.” (Red Pepper (20 December 2014) *M23 Rebels To Return To Bihanga*)

An article from the Kenyan newspaper The East African states:

“Around 1,000 ex-fighters from a Democratic Republic of Congo rebel group were found in a Ugandan refugee camp Wednesday, a day after fleeing moves to repatriate them, the Ugandan army said. The ex-rebels from the M23 group fled the Bihanga camp 300 kilometres southwest of Kampala on Tuesday, as the Ugandan army attempted to repatriate some of the group. Ugandan army spokesman Paddy Ankunda told AFP that around 1,000 ex-rebels were in the nearby Rwamwanja refugee camp, run by the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), on Wednesday. Thirty five returned to Bihanga, he said on his Twitter account.” (The East African (18 December 2014) *DR Congo ex-rebels found in Uganda refugee camp*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

#### **References:**

Agence France Presse (16 December 2014) *M23 ex-rebels break out of Uganda camp*

<http://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 22 April 2015)

This is a subscription database

Agence France Presse (13 December 2014) *Slow progress in DR Congo's M23 rebel deal risking peace: envoys*

<http://www.lexisnexis.com>

(Accessed 23 April 2015)  
This is a subscription database

Associated Press Online (8 December 2014) *Congo rebels not ready to return from Uganda*

<http://www.lexisnexus.com>

(Accessed 23 April 2015)  
This is a subscription database

Associated Press (24 April 2014) *Hundreds of Congolese M23 rebels stuck in Uganda*

<http://www.lexisnexus.com>

(Accessed 23 April 2015)  
This is a subscription database

Daily Monitor (10 December 2014) *Government to repatriate hundreds of M23 rebels in Uganda*

<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Government-to-repatriate-hundreds-of-M23-rebels-in-Uganda/-/688334/2551040/-/format/xhtml/-/v84ybv/-/index.html>

(Accessed 23 April 2015)

The East African (18 December 2014) *DR Congo ex-rebels found in Uganda refugee camp*

<http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/DR-Congo-ex-rebels-found-in-Uganda-refugee-camp/-/2558/2560882/-/fd7javz/-/index.html>

(Accessed 23 April 2015)

IHS Global Insight (18 December 2014) *Departure of Congolese rebels from Ugandan camps raises risks of renewed M23 rebellion in eastern DRC*

<http://www.lexisnexus.com>

(Accessed 22 April 2015)  
This is a subscription database

Radio France Internationale (5 November 2014) *Observers say former DR Congo rebels could reorganise, rearm*

<http://www.lexisnexus.com>

(Accessed 23 April 2015)  
This is a subscription database

Red Pepper (20 December 2014) *M23 Rebels To Return To Bihanga*

<http://www.redpepper.co.ug/m23-rebels-to-return-to-bihanga/>

(Accessed 23 April 2015)

Rwanda News Agency (17 December 2014) *Ex-DR Congo rebels say fired at by Ugandan troops in "forced" expatriation bid*

<http://www.lexisnexus.com>

(Accessed 22 April 2015)  
This is a subscription database

Voice of America News (16 December 2014) *Nearly 1,000 Congolese Rebels  
Escape From Camp in Uganda*

<http://www.voanews.com/content/congolese-rebels-escape-in-uganda/2561451.html>

(Accessed 23 April 2015)

**Sources Consulted:**

All Africa

BBC Monitoring

Daily Monitor

Electronic Immigration Network

European Country of Origin Information Network

Google

Lexis Nexis

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

UNHCR Refworld