

## Hundreds more flee continuing LRA attacks in north-east Congo



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DUNGU, Democratic Republic of the Congo, March 30 (UNHCR) – Continuing attacks by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have displaced more than 1,200 people and killed two in north-east Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) this month. This brings the known number of displaced in Orientale province this year to more than 4,200, but the figure could be higher.

Neighbouring South Sudan and the Central African Republic have also been affected by violence from the LRA, a brutal Ugandan rebel group which is being hunted by various armed forces in the central Africa region.



A displaced Congolese woman carries a bag of non-food items distributed by UNHCR in Dungu.

"Since our last update on March 6, there have been 13 new LRA attacks in north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Most occurred in Dungu territory between March 6 and 28," a UNHCR spokesperson said Friday.

"Two people were killed and 13 abducted, including a child in the town of Aba. The violence has also displaced more than 1,230 people in the Dungu area," she added. "Many others could be displaced, but we don't have the [precise] numbers because we don't have access to many areas," UNHCR External Affairs Officer Céline Schmitt said in Dungu on Friday.

She said there had also been reports of attacks by the Ugandan rebel group in Bondo, close to the border with the Central African Republic (CAR). UNHCR has been helping people who have found shelter in and around Dungu.

UNHCR and the World Food Programme distributed aid to 200 families, or about 1,000 people displaced in March, in Dungu on Thursday. The UNHCR aid included plastic sheeting, sleeping mats, kitchen sets, mosquito nets and jerry cans.

In CAR itself, attacks attributed to the LRA resumed in January after a lull since April 2011. Eleven LRA attacks have been recorded in the south-eastern part of the country this year. Eight of those took place near the towns of Zemio and Mboki, where UNHCR assists refugees and internally displaced populations.

Four people were killed during the attacks and 31 abducted, according to the CAR defence and security forces.

The security situation in south-eastern CAR remains extremely fragile. One exception is in the city of Obo, where the situation has improved with the presence of United States troops deployed last October to bolster efforts by the joint CAR-Ugandan armed forces hunting the LRA and its leadership.

UNHCR field staff say that patrols around Obo by the two national armies supported by US military advisers have enabled local authorities to ensure security within a 25-kilometre radius of Obo, compared to 5 km before. The extended security perimeter is allowing residents to tend their farms.

The LRA also conducts hit-and-run attacks in South Sudan. According to the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in 2011 such attacks killed 18 people, wounded nine, and resulted in 49 abductions and 7,382 people being internally displaced.

No known LRA attacks have occurred in South Sudan this year, however UNHCR regularly receives new groups of refugees fleeing LRA attacks in the DRC and CAR. South Sudan's Western and Central Equatoria states together now host more than 22,000 refugees from these two neighbouring countries, including more than 700 new arrivals this year.

South Sudan is preparing to host African Union forces to coordinate a regional effort to eliminate LRA threats.

UNHCR welcomes the unprecedented regional and international initiatives aimed at ending the LRA atrocities in CAR, DRC and South Sudan and urges all actors to respect human rights and minimize risk to civilian populations.

Indiscriminate LRA assaults on civilians in these three countries have left an estimated 440,000 people internally displaced or living as refugees. Some 335,000 of them are found in DRC alone.

UNHCR works with the local authorities, other UN agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations to assist people who escape or are rescued from the LRA. Some survivors have told UNHCR staff that during their captivity, they were tortured before being used as porters. Some also witnessed the killing of their relatives.

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