

Eastern Congo Conflict

# Eastern Congo peace agreement - Is stability finally coming?

*BENITA PUNGWE, PROGRAM OFFICER HSF CONGO  
RAFAEL MERZ, COUNTRY DIRECTOR*

On 27 June 2025, the foreign ministers of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda signed a peace agreement in Washington DC under US mediation - a possible turning point in the conflict that has been going on for over 30 years. Although similar agreements have failed before, the active role of the USA could be decisive this time. Despite US President Donald Trump's presumed ambitions to win the Nobel Peace Prize, economic interests take precedence: the agreement - estimated to be worth several billion dollars - promotes supply chain transparency so that US companies can invest directly in the mining sector in eastern Congo. In this way, the growing influence of China in the region can also be counteracted.

### Content of the agreement

At first glance, the signed peace agreement may appear to be an important step towards de-escalation. In addition to the media attention, the agreement contains both ambitious and vague measures. The key points of the agreement include Respect for territorial integrity, the establishment of a joint mechanism for security coordination in the region, the disciplining and integration of non-state armed groups (including FDLR<sup>1</sup>, M23<sup>2</sup>), the return and protection of refugees and internally displaced people, the opening of humanitarian access and, finally, the establishment of a regional framework for economic integration.

The agreement emphasises the territorial integrity of both countries, which would mean the withdrawal of Rwandan troops from eastern Congo. At the same time, both countries are called upon to coordinate in the area of security in order to better monitor the activities of various armed groups in the region. However, this contradictory point - between the joint security coordination and the simultaneous withdrawal of Rwandan soldiers from eastern Congo - seems to take a back seat to the economic opportunities offered by the agreement.

### Opportunities associated with high risks

The agreement can have an economic leverage effect as it is accompanied by investments in the mining sector and infrastructure. There is great potential for regional economic growth here if a legal and financial framework is created. There is also broad support from the US, which is showing strong political will with the Trump administration, particularly on investment issues. The agreement also offers the opportunity to drive forward regional integration through existing institutions such as the EAC<sup>3</sup> and AfCFTA<sup>4</sup>.

Nevertheless, actors from Congolese civil society criticise the agreement because it excludes numerous rebel groups such as the ADF<sup>5</sup>, CODECO<sup>6</sup> and in particular the M23 and neglects justice. The perpetrators of human rights violations and war crimes in the conflict are not held accountable under this peace agreement. A special emphasis is therefore only placed on the raw materials component. Shortly after the Trump administration agreed on a minerals deal with Ukraine for rare earths, the Congolese government took a similar position: minerals in exchange for the full commitment of the USA to pacify the eastern Congo. The “minerals strategy” is therefore the main motivation of the USA, possibly to the detriment of lasting peace in eastern Congo. The USA is securing access to cobalt, lithium, tantalum and copper, which are essential for modern technology, in the hope of remaining

<sup>1</sup> FDLR = Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda: Rwandan Hutu rebel group, consisting of former perpetrators of the genocide in Rwanda

<sup>2</sup> M23 = March 23: Congolese Tutsi rebel groups

<sup>3</sup> EAC = East African Community

<sup>4</sup> AfCFTA = The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a free trade area comprising all 55 member states of the African Union (AU)

<sup>5</sup> ADF = Allied Democratic Forces: Ugandan rebels linked to the IS who carry out attacks in Uganda

<sup>6</sup> CODECO = Coopérative pour le développement du Congo: regional militia group



competitive with China. China has had a strong presence in Congo for over 25 years due to its interest in rare earths and concluded an agreement with the Congolese government in 2007. This agreement - worth several billion dollars in investment - provided for China to build infrastructure in exchange for access to copper and cobalt mines.

Congolese civil society and human rights activists warn of “neo-colonial exploitation” without accountability and reconciliation. For Rwanda, economic integration means legitimising previously informal mineral supply chains. According to a report by Global Witness<sup>7</sup>, only around 10 per cent of the mineral resources exported by Rwanda actually come from the country itself - the majority is smuggled from the Congo.

### A chance for real peace?

The form of the peace agreement raises doubts as to whether there is a real chance of lasting peace. Although it is intended that the United Nations, the USA and the African Union will take on a monitoring role in the implementation and realisation of the measures, the agreements are still vague, as there are no precise timetables or concrete mechanisms for implementation. The exclusion of the more than 100 active armed groups in the region from the negotiations is a risk that should not be underestimated. Fighting continues to take place as these groups do not feel affected by the peace negotiations.

Nevertheless, the parties involved assure that further negotiations will continue with them, such as the talks in Doha or the initially failed Nairobi process. However, it is clear that non-state armed groups are difficult to control. The decisive factor will therefore be how great the incentive will be for them to abandon their previous strategy and integrate into the Congolese national army, the FARDC, as envisaged in the agreement.

The UN peacekeeping mission MONUSCO<sup>8</sup>, which had come under increasing criticism after more than 25 years in eastern Congo, is now being reinforced in its role as a humanitarian shield. In view of the increasing number of internally displaced persons, MONUSCO has established itself as a key player in the protection of the civilian population, particularly where state capacities are limited, thanks to its many years of experience and comprehensive infrastructure.

This agreement has a real chance of success if it is implemented consistently, involves all parties to the conflict and combines economic stimulus with political reforms. The involvement of the USA as a hegemonic power lends weight to the agreement. Germany's commitment within the framework of the EU and multilateral structures could also be decisive in transforming this drive for peace into lasting stability. Without these integrative and institutional additions, the agreement - like its predecessors - is in danger of fading away.

<sup>7</sup> Global Witness (2022), The ITSCI laundromat

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)