



KIVU SECURITY TRACKER

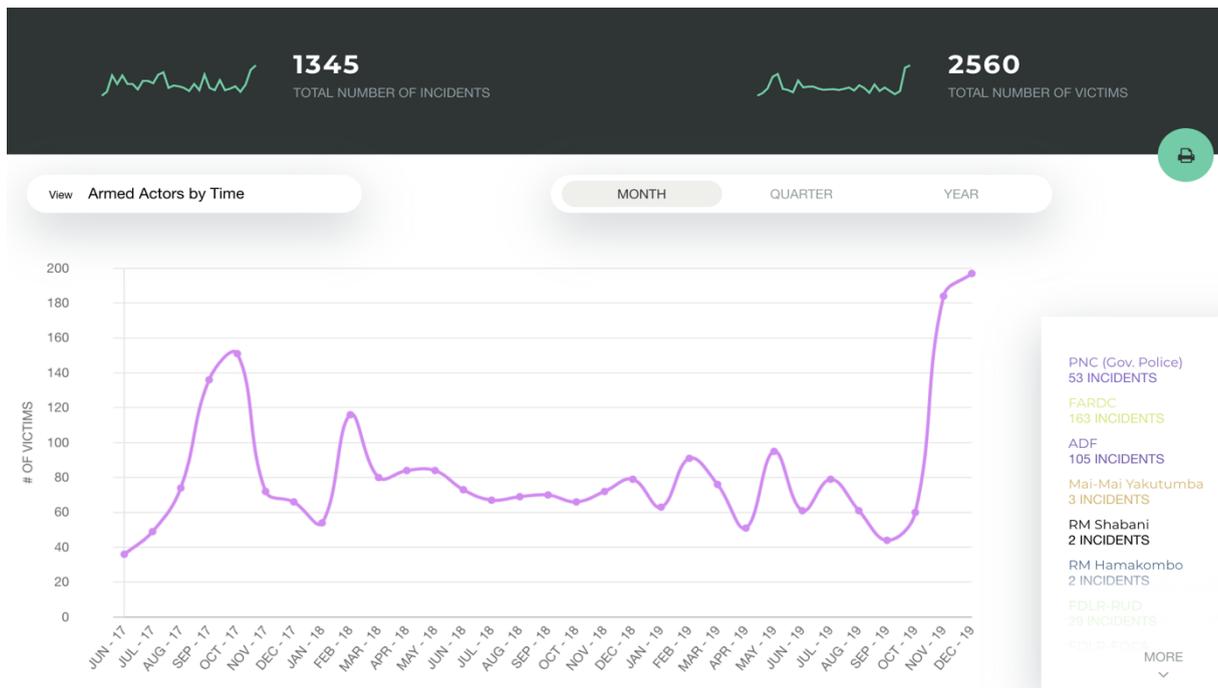
CIVILIAN DEATHS SET A NEW RECORD

MONTHLY REPORT – DECEMBER 2019

197 violent deaths (↑8% from November 2019)
 49 abducted or kidnapped (↓48%)
 63 clashes (↑2%)

December 2019 was the deadliest month for civilian deaths ever recorded by the Kivu Security Tracker since its creation in June 2017. Armed groups and security forces killed at least 197

civilians over the course of the last 31 days of 2019. This unprecedented death toll was logged at a time when [November 2019 also saw record numbers of civilian deaths](#).



Number of civilian deaths by month since the creation of KST in June 2017

The severity of this death toll can largely be explained by the continually high number of civilians killed in Beni territory: 120 people killed, in attacks mostly attributed to the Islamist rebels of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). This statistic is comparable to that of November 2019 (126).

However, adding to the Beni crisis, a new deadly front was opened with the Congolese military offensive against the Rwandan Hutu uprising by the National Council for Renewal and Democracy (CNRD) in the highlands of Kalehe. This attack successfully led to the rebellion retreating from [the bases it had occupied since early 2019](#). But many civilians were also killed, mostly among rebel fighters' families. KST has been able to confirm the violent deaths of at least ten non-combatants. Some local sources have reported significantly higher numbers, perhaps as many as a hundred victims.

Moreover, humanitarian workers were targeted in several attacks, particularly in Beni, Lubero, and Fizi territories. In the first two of these, attacks were essentially carried out by the Mai-Mai Kyandega group, which has been undergoing a revival since last June. A United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees expatriate was also kidnapped in Baraka at the end of December, before being freed three days later.

These attacks could further complicate humanitarian work, and particularly the response to the Ebola epidemic, which was on the rise in December.

Beni: Unrelenting Killing

Civilians killings continued at an alarming rate in this territory in December with 120 deaths logged by KST. That is slightly less than the death toll for November (123 deaths), itself the worst ever recorded by KST in this territory.

Of the 18 cases of killings, KST was able to identify the ADF as the highly likely responsible party in 13 cases. This heavy toll suggests that the operations launched by the Congolese army against this uprising, on October 29, had not secured a significant reduction in the ADF's capacity to harm and have not been accompanied by effective measures to protect civilians.

Operations against the ADF nevertheless continued, with the logistical support of MONUSCO, particularly in evacuating wounded Congolese soldiers.

In total, according to the FARDC, the fighting caused the deaths of 60 people and the wounding of 175 members of the regular army. At the start of December, the Congolese army also estimated that it had killed 80 ADF combatants. None of these figures, however, are verifiable by independent sources; several diplomatic sources claim that the number of Congolese soldiers killed is much higher.

At the end of December, KST had only been able to verify the death of one of the four ADF "generals" that the army claimed to have "neutralized."

Beni and Lubero: the Mai-Mai Kyandenga Attack the Ebola Response

The Mai-Mai Kyandenga group attacked Ebola virus response facilities on four occasions in December. On the 5th, they set fire to two disease control facilities in the locality of Cantine in Beni territory. On the 15th, they attacked FARDC soldiers guarding the WHO base in the same locality. On the 28th, they attacked the health center of Mandelya village, in Lubero territory, where they destroyed medical equipment and kidnapped a nurse, set free the

following day after the payment of a ransom. And on the 30th, they attacked the health center of Ngazi village.

This group had, however, disappeared off KST's radar since 2017, particularly after the [arrest of its head, the "sorcerer" Jean-Baptiste Kyandenga, in August 2018](#).

Following [his escape from the military prosecutor's offices, in November 2018](#) (in French), Kyandenga appears to have been able to reorganize his men. According to the head of a rival armed group at the time, he is reported to have received support in financing and training from Kikonjo speakers from Uganda.

In June 2019, his group relaunched their attacks, setting fire to police stations and to National Intelligence Agency offices in the village of Makumbo in Lubero territory. On November 15, it gained notoriety by briefly taking control of the Mabasele neighborhood in Oicha, where a massacre attributed to the ADF had just occurred. One of the leaders of the group, the « professor » Kakuhi Matabishi, appears to lead the group's most active fringe.

Masisi and Rutshuru: Nyatura Retreat

After several months of clashes with the FARDC, [elements of the Rwandan army \(RDF\)](#) and the Nduma Defense of Congo-Renové (NDC-R), Rwandan Hutu rebel groups and their allies among the Nyatura militias appear weakened in the *Petit Nord* of North Kivu.

These militia groups, which are mostly comprised of Hutu combatants, were not, in fact, implicated in any significant incidences in Masisi territory in December. On December 24, "General" Delta Gashamari Dusabe surrendered with some 30 of his combatants in Kinigi in the Kibabi *groupement*. He was the head of one of the main Nyatura groups, which was implicated in 13 incidents documented by KST, and that led to the death of two civilians.

In Masisi territory, only the Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS) appears to have resisted the advance of the NDC-R.

Most Nyatura groups have taken refuge in Rutshuru territory, where they are the main target of the FARDC according to a military source.

Goma and Nyiragongo: tensions with the police

A major wave of burglaries in the Goma neighborhoods of Kasika and Katoyi, as well as the killing of a 13-year-old child by a female police officer, provoked anti-law enforcement protests in December.

These protests shook the capital of North Kivu, particularly on December 10 and 20, and led to at least one police station being set ablaze. A policeman, who was accused of being a robber, was lynched by the crowd.

Kalehe, Kabare, Mwenga, and Shabunda: Deadly Fighting in the Highlands

The month of December saw an upsurge in the offensive launched on November 26 by the FARDC against CNRD Rwandan Hutu rebels in the highlands of Kalehe. KST recorded nine clashes in this territory, compared with four the previous month. Fighting also took place in the neighboring territories of Mwenga and Shabunda.

According to several sources from the authorities and local civil society, the FARDC have been joined in their offensive by several Raia Mutomboki (Hamakombo, Lance Muteya, Ngando, Bikambi and Bipopampompa) groups as well as Mai-Mai groups (particularly Kirikicho, Makofi and Kifuafua).

Several military and local civil society sources also claim that the FARDC is covertly supported by the RDF. According to a Western diplomatic source, two battalions of the Rwandan army were even present “on the front lines” during the fighting.

Such fighting was the source of collateral damage among CNRD civilians. KST was able to identify a clash, in the village of Nguliro on December 5, during which [ten non-combatants within CNRD's ranks were killed](#). Several local authority and civil society sources claim that the death toll among non-combatants could well be much higher. According to these sources, whose allegations had not been independently verified at the time of writing of this report, more than one hundred civilians are reported to have been killed in Kalonge groupement between December 3 and 7. The bodies are reported to have been exposed for several days before being buried by the inhabitants, particularly in the two mass graves of Bugaru locality.

The CNRD appears to have also committed atrocities during this time. Two men were [stabbed and killed in Bugaru by unidentified men who could be linked to this group](#).

Many CNRD combatants and non-combatants were captured during the fighting, before being transported to Nyamunyuni camp, close to Kavumu airport. Detention conditions there were particularly poor: [according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, 17 people, including nine children have died there](#). According to a FARDC officer, all of those detained in the camp have been transferred to Rwanda. In total, this is 2235 civilians and 357 combatants.

This represents a highly significant weakening of the CNRD, whose number of combatants in Kalehe territory is estimated at [400 by the Group of Experts on the DRC](#). KST civil society sources, for their part, estimate some 5000 members of this group had [settled in the Kalehe highlands at the start of 2019](#) (in French).

However, some of them were able to flee the advance of the FARDC coalition towards the adjacent territories of Walungu and Mwenga. Their political head, Laurent Ndagijimana, aka Wilson Irategeka, and their military head, Habimana Hamada, in particular, were not captured.

These operations also caused tensions with the territory's population. The FARDC established a curfew and called for searches to be carried out in the village of Katasomwa, which seems to have heightened tensions between the Tembo and Hutu communities of the town, as well as the departure of a majority of the Tembo population. Operations against the CNRD in Kalehe also caused tensions with the neighboring territory of Kabare. According to our sources, members of the FARDC participating in the operation have committed abuses against the inhabitants of the village of Miti (lootings, torture and firearm injuries) between December 11 and 17. This led to the village's population to rise up in protest.

Following the offensive, the areas previously occupied by the CNRD appear to have been occupied by other armed groups. The Raia Mutomboki Hamakombo, Bipopampompa, Lance, Butachibera, Shabani, Mungoro, Bikambi and Gaston were reported in Kalima and Kalonge groupements. The Mai-Mai Makofi, Bachisimire, Simba, Kirikicho and Kifuafua for their part were reported in the highlands.

Fizi and Uvira: Ongoing Tensions

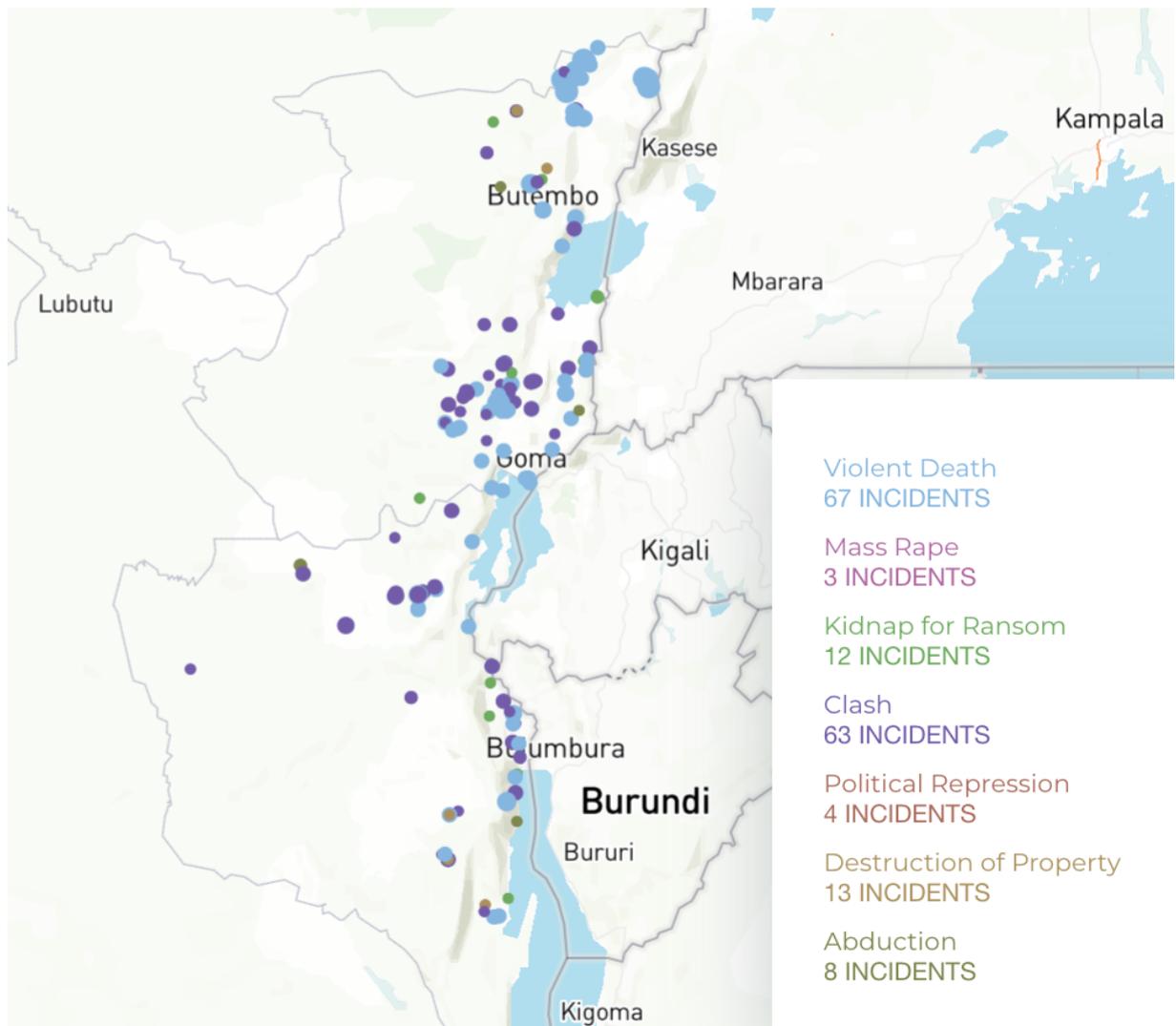
There was a slight decrease in security incidents in the territories of Fizi and Uvira: KST logged 26 compared with 32 in November. These were mainly related to the conflict

opposing the militia from the Banyamulenge community with the militia from other communities (Babembe, Bafuliru and Banyindu). Each of these armed groups regularly attack civilians and cattle from other communities.

Mediation initiatives by local authorities and NGOs to reduce tensions, such as the Murhesa meeting on December 17 and 19 have not been very effective: they were boycotted by the main active armed groups. An uptick in clashes was also recorded in Bijombo groupement at the end of the month.

Furthermore, several local sources have reported the arrival of CNRD combatants, following the clashes in Kalehe and in the territories of Itombwe and Lwindi. The arrival of this Rwandan armed group risks [heightening the regional dimension of this conflict](#).

Additionally, controlling the Ruzizi plain appears to have become an increasingly strategic issue with the impending Burundi presidential elections, scheduled for next May. According to several local security sources, Mai-Mai groups such as the Mbulu have taken positions with the support of some members of Burundi security authorities so as to block possible infiltrations to Burundi from North Kivu.



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The Kivu Security Tracker (KST) is a joint project of the Congo Research Group, based at New York University's Center on International Cooperation, and Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch trains and provides any other assistance to KST researchers but does not independently verify all of the incidents tracked and does not necessarily support all of the arguments raised by KST.