



DRC: ‘WE DIDN’T COME TO PLAY’

**M23 ABUSES AT ARTISANAL MINES AND THE
TRAFFICKING OF GOLD AND COLTAN TO RWANDA**

RESEARCH
BRIEFING

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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*A view from a mining site near Rubaya,
Democratic Republic of Congo. ©
Private*

The Rwanda-backed M23 armed group and its collaborators have killed, tortured, ill-treated and arbitrarily detained miners at the coltan mine near Rubaya and the Lomera gold mine in eastern DRC. Given the large amounts of minerals trafficked to Rwanda – often with the complicity of Rwandan and M23 leaders – it is likely that Rwanda is directly engaged in pillaging DRC resources.

GLOSSARY

WORD	DESCRIPTION
AFDL	Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire
ANR	National Intelligence Agency
CNDP	National Congress for the Defence of the People
FDLR	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda
HRC	Human Rights Council
IHL	international humanitarian law
IPIS	International Peace Information Service
ITSCI	International Tin Supply Chain Initiative
M23	March 23 Movement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RCD	Congolese Rally for Democracy
RDB	Rwanda Development Board
RDF	Rwanda Defence Forces
SOMINKI	<i>Société Minière et Industrielle du Kivu</i>
SMB	<i>Société Minière de Bisunzu Sarl</i>

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“When we got out of the mineshaft with the mineralized sand [soil containing gold], there were five-well armed [M23 fighters] and three who were not armed. They said: “We didn’t come to play. If you resist [giving us the soil containing gold], we will kill you.”

Former mine worker at Lomera mine, in a voice call interview, February 2026

Of the scores of artisanal mines in North and South Kivu provinces in eastern DRC, dozens are controlled by the Rwandan-backed March 23 Movement (M23) armed group. Tens of thousands of mostly young men rely on them for income. M23’s treatment of these men has, so far, remained in the shadows. M23 is a Congolese armed group that includes many fighters from Rwanda. It tightly controls access to these mines, none of which benefit from the oversight of international mining traceability organizations. Moreover, few independent journalists or human rights defenders have been granted access to the sites. Despite M23’s pronouncements of bringing order to the areas it controls, M23 fighters and their Rwandan backers frequently commit serious human rights abuses, including those that likely amount to crimes under international law, against artisanal miners and others living and working near the mines.

This briefing documents Amnesty International’s research into M23 abuses at two mining sites: a coltan mine near the town of Rubaya, in Masisi territory of North Kivu province, and Lomera, a gold mine in Kabare territory of South Kivu province. Amnesty International documented summary killings; torture and ill-treatment; arbitrary detention; forced labour; forced recruitment; and pillage by M23. The research is based on 26 interviews with artisanal miners; mining experts; mineshaft owners; family members of victims; civil society members; and a medical professional. Amnesty International also reviewed reports by local human rights defenders on abuses at Rubaya, Lomera, and Ngungu, a gold mine in Masisi, and photos and videos of evidence from mining sites.

In 2025, DRC produced more than 50% of the world’s tantalum – an ore derived from coltan - with the Rubaya mine producing around 15%. Coltan – short for columbite-tantalite, - is

comprised of columbite (an ore of niobium) and tantalum, two ores that are often mined together. Niobium is used in the production of iron and steel, as well as capacitors, spacecraft engines, and heat-resistant components. Tantalum is used in medical implants, smartphones, and aerospace components. Both minerals are eagerly sought by companies and countries across the world.

DRC exported more than 28 tons of gold in 2025 – most of it mined industrially. However, millions of dollars' worth of artisanal gold is illicitly smuggled out of the country every year. The US Treasury Department noted in June 2026, for example, that in the early part of the year, at least 60 kilograms of gold worth millions of dollars, were smuggled out of eastern DRC to Gasabo Gold refinery in Kigali, Rwanda.

Armed groups and foreign countries have fought over access to DRC's minerals and natural resources for decades, fuelling cycles of conflict, which persist today.

Amnesty International wrote to the M23 spokesperson and an M23 mining representative on 11 August 2026. The organization shared its findings and requested information about the conduct of M23 fighters and its representatives who administer the Rubaya and Lomera mines in relation to specific allegations documented in this briefing. At the time of publication, the organization had not received any response from M23 representatives.

In addition, Amnesty International sent a summary of our findings regarding the trafficking of minerals from DRC to Rwanda and a list of questions to the Rwandan President Paul Kagame on 17 August 2026 and the Rwanda Mines, Petroleum and Gas Board on 6 August 2026. At the time of publication, the organization had not received a response from Rwandan officials.

1.1 A PATTERN OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

Amnesty International's interviews and other evidence established a clear and disturbing pattern of frequent, violent abuses in mines by M23 fighters or individuals who collaborate with them. Victims said that they feared M23 and those who collaborate because of the ill-treatment and torture they inflicted on fellow miners.

Amnesty International documented the summary killing of 18 artisanal miners by M23 or their collaborators, at least nine of whom were beaten brutally and died at health centres or before they reached the hospital. Two detainees lashed out against a female M23 fighter after being tortured, which led to an M23 commander ordering that they be killed; the two men were shot to death at point blank range. An M23 collaborator who monitored diggers underground beat one man with a pickaxe in the chest, killing him. His body was buried in the mineshaft. When his brother attempted to report the killing, he was detained and punished, forced to dig for M23 in a mineshaft for more than two weeks.

Amnesty International documented how M23 fighters tortured and ill-treated artisanal miners. Of the 26 people interviewed by Amnesty International, 16 were miners or civilians who lived near mining areas who said that M23 or its mine security guards had tortured or ill-treated them. Some miners were beaten so badly that they were hospitalized. Others lost consciousness and were taken by fellow miners to health centres. Miners described how security guards in mines – who collaborated with M23 – beat them if they requested breaks, refused to hand over minerals, or for minor transgressions.

For example, M23 detained four men in Lomera and accused them of communicating with authorities in Kinshasa and suspected them of having links to the Wazalendo, state-

sponsored armed groups that serve as proxies for the government in its fight against M23. One man overheard an M23 fighter say that if they found images of rebels in the phones, they would kill them. M23 then confiscated the phones from some of the men. The men were handcuffed and taken to a detention centre where they were beaten morning and night. One detainee said he was lashed 80 times, twice a day, and forced to count each blow aloud. The supervisor of the jail told him: “I will kill you and then give you a weapon and say you were Wazalendo.”

Amnesty International documented the use of underground detention cells known as *ndake*, which are roughly 1.5 to 2 meters deep and covered with tarpaulins, logs or earth to conceal them. More than 20 miners from Rubaya were kept in a pit and beaten three times a day by M23 fighters. Amnesty International has previously documented M23’s use of *ndake* in Goma.

M23 uses the mines as forced recruitment sites where miners have been forcibly enrolled in the M23 armed group. Seven artisanal miners from Lomera and Rubaya described to Amnesty International how M23 detained miners and threatened to send them to Rumangabo or Tchanzou, sites in Rutshuru territory in North Kivu province where M23 trains fighters. The threats were intended to force miners to quickly collect money to pay ransoms for their release. One miner witnessed M23 trucks leaving Lomera last year full of miners going to M23 military training camps.

Forced labour is common at M23-controlled mines. Amnesty International interviewed miners who described how they were detained and forced to dig minerals for M23 fighters if they were unable to pay ransoms for their release. Other miners described how they were forced to work for days or weeks in underground mineshafts in inhumane conditions for little to no pay.

1.2 M23 AND RWANDAN PERPETRATORS

Victims interviewed by Amnesty identified M23 and the security guards and miners with whom they collaborate based on their uniforms, the fact they often carried weapons, and that M23 was the only armed group that controlled the Rubaya and Lomera mines.

According to the victims, some M23 fighters and those who collaborated with M23 in the mines were Rwandans. Victims were able to identify them as Rwandans based on the language and dialect that they spoke, their inability to speak Swahili correctly, their close relationship with other Kinyarwanda speakers, as well as, at times, on how they self-identified.

Rwandans controlled mineshafts, were security guards, or in charge of M23 detention sites. While Amnesty International could not definitively confirm the identity or nationality of these individuals, the testimonies obtained suggest that some Rwandans play a dual role as civilian miners but also take part in hostilities when needed and operate alongside M23 fighters. They were present at Rubaya and Lomera and, in some cases, exercised authority, and have committed human rights abuses, including those that may amount to crimes under international law.

M23 has exclusive control over Rubaya and Lomera mines, and much of the area surrounding the mines. While other armed groups have launched military operations against Rubaya, M23 has maintained exclusive control over the mine.

The Rwandan government's influence, control, and decision making over key aspects of M23 intelligence and military matters has been well-documented. The UN Group of Experts on DRC estimates that 8,000 to 10,000 Rwandan Defence Forces (RDF) soldiers operate in South Kivu and between 6,000 to 8,000 in North Kivu.

The UN Group of Experts has collected evidence that confirms “the systematic presence of RDF alongside AFC/M23, its key role in the successful military operations aiming at territorial conquest and occupation and its de facto control and direction over AFC/M23 military operations.”

The role that the RDF play in M23 includes providing anti-aerial defence systems, kamikaze and armed drones, and jamming and spoofing technology. Thousands of RDF troops have supported M23 military operations in North and South Kivu. Senior Rwandan military officials appointed by Rwandan president Paul Kagame oversee operations and cooperation between Rwanda and M23. Moreover, Rwandan officials continue to play an outsized operational role in M23 battlefield strategy, directing M23 military leaders which areas to seize, hold or withdraw from.

1.3 RESPONSIBILITY OF RWANDA

While Amnesty International could not definitively determine who the Rwandans at Rubaya and Lomera worked for, if these individuals are Rwandan military or Rwanda government personnel, Rwanda bears direct state responsibility and its officials, international criminal responsibility, for the violations documented by Amnesty International. Rwanda may also bear state responsibility for these acts if these Rwandan individuals are acting under the direction or control of the State, even if they are not directly employed by Rwanda.

Amnesty International confirmed that some of the soil containing gold mined in DRC is trafficked to Kamembe, a town in Rusizi District in Rwanda, which is across the border from Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu. Soil containing gold is sent to Kamembe via Lake Kivu in boats and also by land. Amnesty International interviewed seven sources who worked at the Lomera mining site who confirmed that soil containing gold from Lomera was loaded onto boats at the Port of Lomera. Sources in Rwanda confirmed that soil containing gold from DRC was brought to Rwanda via Lake Kivu and by road. The soil was transported to a collection point – known as the “sand port” in Kamembe by boats accompanied by motorized speed boats from Rwanda. An eyewitness said pickup trucks or other vehicles take the sacks of soil from the sand port to unknown destinations. One eyewitness confirmed having seen vehicles carrying unprocessed soil to a location in Kamembe known as Kacyangugu, a hill in Kamembe where a police station is located. Amnesty International was unable to confirm where the raw material from DRC was taken after it left Kamembe.

The United Nations and Global Witness have documented how coltan is trafficked from Rubaya to Rwanda, how M23 imposes taxes on traders who must pay M23 and Rwanda per kilogram of coltan, and how the coltan from the DRC is mixed into Rwanda's supply chain.

Given the significant amounts of gold and coltan trafficked to Rwanda – often with the complicity of Rwandan and M23 leaders and with Rwanda knowing that they were illegally acquired during the armed conflict - it is likely that Rwanda is itself directly engaged in pillaging the resources of the DRC. Regarding preventing and addressing human rights harms linked to mining activities, Rwanda claims that it complies with international due diligence guidelines and collaborates with international oversight bodies. However, the

trafficking of coltan and gold from DRC to Rwanda, including by boat across Lake Kivu, and the numerous Rwandans collaborating with M23 in Lomera and Rubaya, disprove Rwanda's claims of adhering to international due diligence and traceability standards.

The nature of the abuses and crimes taking place at the Lomera and Rubaya mines mean that companies, their executives, and employees risk being accomplices in war crimes, if they buy coltan or gold from Rwanda, and if they are aware of the likelihood that the proceeds would substantially contribute to commission of those crimes.

1.4 AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International calls on M23 to immediately end all human rights abuses at the mining sites it controls, including Rubaya, Lomera, and Ngungu, including removing all individuals involved in human rights abuses at the Rubaya and Lomera mining sites. Rwanda should immediately end the smuggling of coltan from Rubaya and gold from Lomera to Rwanda, ensure that all persons, including government officials who are complicit in, or participate in, the smuggling of coltan and in the human rights abuses at the mines are held accountable.

International actors must also urgently press M23 to stop all human rights abuses in mining sites, including the Rubaya and Lomera mines. In particular, the United States should ensure any mining deal involving the Rubaya mine or other M23-controlled mines in DRC is contingent upon allowing international mining oversight organizations and human rights observers full and unfettered access to the mines.

Moreover, all states and companies domiciled in their territory, including EU member states and businesses domiciled in their territory, must cease the purchase of coltan and gold from Rwanda – or processors and refineries from third countries that buy coltan and gold from suppliers in Rwanda – until the Rwandan government provides concrete evidence that it has ended the receipt of coltan and gold pillaged from DRC. Rwanda must ensure that Rwandans have no role in abusive mining operations. If they are, they should be investigated and held to account, including by relevant regional or international judicial mechanisms.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research briefing into M23 abuses against artisanal miners includes cases of summary killings, torture, forced labour and pillage. The research focused principally on two artisanal mining sites in eastern DRC controlled by M23: the large coltan mining area near the town of Rubaya in Masisi and the gold mine in Kabare known as Lomera. The Rubaya mine provides an estimated 15% of the world's tantalum.¹

The findings of the briefing are based on 26 interviews with diggers, mineshaft owners, residents in mining areas, civil society actors, mining technical experts, a healthcare worker, and others between January and April 2026. Interviews included 10 individuals who work in or near the Rubaya mine, including diggers, victims of torture or those who had witnessed it, including one whose family member was beaten to death; 13 diggers or civilians who worked or lived near Lomera; and three individuals, including a technical expert, a health care provider and another victim who had first-hand knowledge of M23's management of the mines

¹UN News, "Collective effort essential to get DR Congo on firm path to peace", <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/09/1155156>, 30 September 2024.

and abuses it committed. Most artisanal miners in DRC are men. Amnesty International interviewed two women for this briefing: a healthcare worker and a civilian who lives near Lomera.

Amnesty International reviewed medical information about miners who had been tortured. In addition, we reviewed photos, videos, and information regarding the transport of soil containing gold on boats from Lomera to other areas for further processing.

All interviews were conducted remotely for security reasons, most of which were done in Swahili or Kinyarwanda using secure phone applications and trusted intermediaries and interpreters. Some interviews were also conducted in French. Names and other identifying details have been omitted for security reasons to protect sources and victims. These names are on file with Amnesty International.

Amnesty International also received credible information from local human rights defenders in late 2025 about M23 abuses of artisanal miners in Rubaya, Lomera and Ngungu.² The abuses included arbitrary detention of artisanal miners, torture, and ransom payments to M23. While most of this research is not reflected in this briefing, the information and abuses documented were consistent with Amnesty International's findings and reflects a pattern of human rights abuses across M23-controlled mines.

The abuses reflected in this briefing represent only a small fraction of the overall abuses committed by M23 fighters and their affiliates at mining sites. Safely conducting confidential interviews with artisanal miners is challenging, particularly given spotty phone and internet networks and the repressive nature of M23's control over the mines and the fear it engenders.

The number of artisanal miners who have worked in the Rubaya and Lomera mines while under M23 control is unknown, but sources indicated that tens of thousands of miners, transporters, mineral washers, and traders were active at the two sites prior to efforts by M23 to control access to the mines, including by preventing mining cooperatives, diggers and residents from working there. Amnesty International's research reflects only a snapshot of the abuses that have likely taken place.

Amnesty International researchers informed interviewees about the nature and purpose of the research and how the information they shared would be used. No financial incentive was offered to interviewees. Informed oral consent was obtained from all interviewees before each interview.

This briefing builds on years of research by Amnesty International on eastern DRC. Amnesty International has documented abuses by numerous DRC and Rwanda-backed armed groups since the 1990s. Since M23 captured Goma in January 2025, Amnesty International has documented the group's abuses, including summary killings, gang rape and torture, and the detention of civilians for ransom, some of which likely amount to war crimes.³

On 11 August 2026, Amnesty International sent a summary of its findings to M23 spokesperson Lawrence Kanyuka and an M23 mining representative. We requested information about the actions of its fighters as well as security guards with whom it collaborates in Lomera and Rubaya and specific allegations documented in this briefing. At the time of publication, the organization had not received a response from M23.

In addition, we sent a summary of our findings regarding the trafficking of minerals from DRC to Rwanda and a list of questions to the Rwandan President Paul Kagame on 17 August 2026 and to the Rwanda Mines, Petroleum and Gas Board on 6 August 2026. At the time of publication, the organization had not received a response from Rwandan officials.

Amnesty International thanks everyone who took part in the research, including victims and witnesses who shared their harrowing accounts at personal risk and in difficult circumstances.

² Research and interviews conducted in late 2025 by human rights defenders in Rubaya, Lomera, and Ngungu on file with Amnesty International.

³ Amnesty International, "DRC: They said we would die: M23 and Wazalendo abuses in eastern Congo", <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr62/0145/2025/en/>, 20 August 2025; Amnesty International, "DRC: M23 kill, torture and hold civilians hostage at detention sites – new investigation", <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/05/drc-m23-kill-torture-and-hold-civilians-hostage-at-detention-sites-new-investigation/>, 27 May 2025.

3. BACKGROUND

M23's history in eastern DRC dates back to its emergence in 2012 when it captured parts of North Kivu – and briefly Goma – and accused the Congolese government of failing to respect the terms of the 23 March 2009 agreement it signed with a previous Rwanda-backed armed group.⁴ After diplomatic efforts and the UN's Force Intervention Brigade forced it to relinquish the areas it controlled, M23's combatants fled to Uganda and Rwanda.

The current M23 armed group emerged in late 2021 and gradually expanded its control over territory in North Kivu, and captured Goma, the capital of North Kivu, in January 2025. M23 went on to take control of Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu, in February 2025, as well as large parts of North and South Kivu, including dozens of lucrative artisanal mines.⁵ Despite ceasefires and an internationally brokered peace agreement between Rwanda and DRC, violent clashes have continued between the Congolese army, along with its proxy forces, and M23, including drone strikes by both sides.⁶

While M23 leaders say they are in DRC to protect the Tutsi community and to bring order to eastern Congo, their actions indicate they are also interested in eastern DRC's minerals.⁷ Moreover, the Rwandan government, which says its troops are in eastern DRC to protect its citizens from the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR),⁸ has backed four armed groups in DRC since the 1990s, all of which profited from critical minerals.⁹

The conflict over DRC's natural resources has fuelled the conflict in eastern DRC and has its roots in the mid-1970s when the former Zairian state mining company, *Société Minière et Industrielle du Kivu* (SOMINKI), was the principal mining enterprise in North and South Kivu.¹⁰ By the early 1980s, however, SOMINKI had started to close many of its industrial mining operations after President Mobutu Sese Seko nationalized companies and handed the management of them over to political allies and their relatives, which contributed to the collapse of the Zairian economy.¹¹

With little to no State investment in public services or transport infrastructure, Congolese relied on the informal economy that had been established under Belgian colonial rule, including reviving established clandestine trade networks and smuggling routes.¹²

Former SOMINKI mining employees and others in the mining sector turned to these clandestine trade networks to smuggle gold and diamonds out of the country. State officials, faced with decreasing international trade and tax revenue, attempted to force sellers to sell to state gold buyers at a fixed price.¹³

⁴ Peace agreement between the government and National Council for the Defence of the People (CNDP), <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/cd090323peace20agreement20betwe20the20government20and20the20cndp.pdf>, 23 March 2009.

⁵ Reuters, "M23 rebels entrench their rule in east Congo even as Trump claims peace", <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/m23-rebels-entrench-their-rule-east-congo-even-trump-claims-peace-2025-12-08/>, 9 December 2025

⁶ UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, Final report, 30 December 2025, UN Doc S/2025/858, Annex 24; Reuters, "Congo rebel leader claims responsibility for drone attack on strategic northeast airport", <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-rebel-leader-claims-responsibility-drone-attack-strategic-northeast-city-2026-02-03/>, 4 February 2026.

⁷ New York Times, "Why are Congo and Rwanda at War?", <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/28/world/africa/congo-m23-rwanda.html>, 28 January 2025; Reuters, "M23 rebels entrench their rule in east Congo even as Trump claims peace", <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/m23-rebels-entrench-their-rule-east-congo-even-trump-claims-peace-2025-12-08/>, 9 December 2025; UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, Midterm report, 27 December 2024, UN Doc S/2024/969, Summary page 2, paras. 64, 65, 66.

⁸ New York Times, "Why are Congo and Rwanda at War?", <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/28/world/africa/congo-m23-rwanda.html>, 28 January 2025; The FDLR is an armed opposition group operating in eastern DRC composed of Rwandan and Congolese fighters and contains remnants of the Interahamwe and former Rwandan soldiers responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide, as well as fighters not involved in the genocide, including many too young to have participated in the genocide.

⁹ Centre on International Cooperation, New York University, *The M23: A Fractious, Entrenched Rebellion*, April 2026, <https://cic.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/The-M23-A-Fractious-Entrenched-Rebellion-April-6-2026-.pdf>.

¹⁰ Belgium owned a 72% stake in SOMINKI, which it sold in 1995; See Pole Institute (2002) *The Coltan Phenomenon: How a rare mineral has changed the life of the population of war-torn North Kivu province in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo*, <http://www.pole-institute.org>.

¹¹ Africa Studies Review, "Confronting Leaders at the Apex of the State: The Growth of the Unofficial Economy in Congo", <https://doi.org/10.2307/524683>, Kisangani N. F. Emizet, p. 107, Vol. 41, No. 1, April 1998.

¹² Global Witness, "Same Old Story: Background study on natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo", https://gw.hacdn.io/media/documents/Same_Old_Story_Global_Witness_DRC_Report_release_date_6_July_2004.pdf, 6 July 2024.

¹³ Africa Studies Review, "Confronting Leaders at the Apex of the State: The Growth of the Unofficial Economy in Congo", <https://doi.org/10.2307/524683>, Kisangani N. F. Emizet, p. 107, Vol. 41, No. 1, April 1998.

The collapsing economy was exacerbated by state officials who ignored directives to curb smuggling. In 1988, for example, gold and diamonds smuggled from Zaire accounted for almost 94% of Belgian imports from Burundi.¹⁴

As DRC's State mismanagement deepened, tax revenue plummeted and informal trade increased. In eastern DRC, Beni and Butembo became a trading hub for gold, ivory, palm oil and coffee, which was sent to Uganda via the DRC border town of Kasindi.¹⁵ Gold and ivory passed through Goma and Rutshuru on their way to Bukavu and Kampala.¹⁶ At the same time, the number of artisanal mining operations dramatically increased as, on the one hand, semi-industrial mining was destroyed by years of neglect and conflict and, on the other, the demand for coltan boomed. Columbite, an ore of niobium, and tantalum are often found together. Tantalum is twice as heavy as columbite and used to make capacitors, which conduct electrical charges in a range of electronics, including cell phones, jet engines and weapons systems.¹⁷ Between 1990 and 1999, tantalum sales for use in electronics increased 300%.¹⁸

In 1996, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), an armed opposition group supported by Rwanda and Uganda and led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila, advanced toward Kinshasa with the aim of overthrowing President Mobutu.¹⁹ Kabila recognized how lucrative minerals were and began marketing them to international companies. He struck mineral deals that resulted in cash down payments estimated at US\$70 million, which helped finance AFDL's march to Kinshasa.²⁰ The governments of Rwanda and Uganda, as well as individuals from the countries, financially benefited from AFDL's involvement in natural resources.²¹ Some estimates showed that Rwanda financed 80% of its army's expenses with profits from natural resources from DRC in 1999.²²

Subsequent Rwanda-backed armed groups such as the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) also benefited from DRC's natural resources. The UN noted that Rwandan forces and their RCD allies looted seven years' worth of stockpiled SOMINKI coltan and cassiterite.²³ Sources told the UN that between 2,000 and 3,000 tons of cassiterite and between 1,000 and 1,500 tons of coltan were flown to Kigali between November 1998 and April 1999.²⁴ In addition, the UN estimated that between late 1999 and late 2000, the Rwandan military may have made up to \$20 million per month by selling coltan.²⁵

Ugandan forces were also reaping financial windfalls in DRC. The UN panel of experts noted in 2001 that members of RCD said that Ugandan forces were eager to occupy areas of eastern DRC where gold and diamond mines were located.²⁶ The UN panel of Experts noted in its report in 2001: "Since 1998, aircraft also fly from the military airports at Entebbe and Kigali, transporting arms, military equipment, soldiers and,

¹⁴ Africa Studies Review, "Confronting Leaders at the Apex of the State: The Growth of the Unofficial Economy in Congo," <https://doi.org/10.2307/524683>, Kisangani N. F. Emizet, p. 99-137, Vol. 41, No. 1, April 1998.

¹⁵ Global Witness, "Same Old Story: Background study on natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo", https://gw.hacdn.io/media/documents/Same_Old_Story_Global_Witness_DRC_Report_release_date_6_July_2004.pdf.

¹⁶ Global Witness, "Same Old Story: Background study on natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo", https://gw.hacdn.io/media/documents/Same_Old_Story_Global_Witness_DRC_Report_release_date_6_July_2004.pdf, 6 July 2004.

¹⁷ Dena Montague, "Stolen Goods: Coltan and Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo", Winter-Spring 2002, SAIS Review (1989-2003), Volume 22, Issue 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26996391?seq=3>.

¹⁸ Dena Montague, "Stolen Goods: Coltan and Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo", (previously cited).

¹⁹ UN Mapping Report, Report of the Mapping Exercise documenting the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed within the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between March 1993 and June 2003, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/CD/DRC_MAPPING_REPORT_FINAL_EN.pdf, August 2010.

²⁰ Jason Stearns, "Paying for War", in Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of Congo and the Great War of Africa, 2011, p. 287

²¹ Amnesty International, "Democratic Republic of Congo: "Our brothers who help kill us": Economic exploitation and human rights abuses in the east", <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AFR62/010/2003/en/>, 31 March 2003.

²² Reports of the UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the DRC (S/2001/357, paras. 110-121 and 180 and S/2002/1146, para. 122).

²³ UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 12 April 2001, UN Doc. S/2001/357, para. 33.

²⁴ UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 12 April 2001, UN Doc. S/2001/357, para. 33.

²⁵ UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 12 April 2001, UN Doc. S/2001/357, para. 130.

²⁶ UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 12 April 2001, UN Doc. S/2001/357, para. 26.

for some companies, merchandise. On the return flights, they will carry coffee, gold, diamond traders and business representatives and, in some cases, soldiers.”²⁷

During this time, the FDLR also controlled several gold and cassiterite mines, particularly in South Kivu.²⁸ FDLR fighters forced civilians to dig for them and sold the minerals to support their armed group. Both the FARDC and the FDLR controlled roadblocks around mines and extorted large sums of money from the thousands of miners and transporters in the areas they controlled.²⁹

In 2006, a new Rwandan-backed armed group emerged, the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), led by Laurent Nkunda, a former RCD leader. After a series of victories over the Congolese army, the CNDP captured large parts of Masisi and Rutshuru in mid-2008. Research suggests that while only a small part of its revenue came from minerals, a large percentage was raised through extortion, illegal taxes, and theft of goods (particularly charcoal) from merchants, businessmen, and farmers passing through roadblocks.³⁰

Coltan prices on the global market surged around 2000, with tantalum jumping from US\$30 per pound to US\$300 per pound.³¹ A Congolese businessman from Masisi obtained a license to explore for minerals in Rubaya in 1999 and received an exploitation license in 2006 for 30.5 square kilometres to mine coltan, wolframite and other minerals³². The businessman relinquished the mining license of Rubaya to *Société Minière de Bisunzu Sarl* (SMB) in 2014, a company owned by his family and managed by his brother.³³

²⁷ UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 12 April 2001, UN Doc. S/2001/357, para. 31.

²⁸ Global Witness, “Under-mining peace: Tin: The Explosive Trade in Cassiterite in Eastern DRC,” https://gw.hacdn.io/media/documents/under-mining_peace.pdf, June 2005; The Enough Project, “From Child Miner to Jewelry Store: The six steps of Congo’s conflict gold”, <https://enoughproject.org/files/Conflict-Gold.pdf>, October 2012.

²⁹ Global Witness, “Under-mining peace: Tin: The Explosive Trade in Cassiterite in Eastern DRC,” (previously cited).

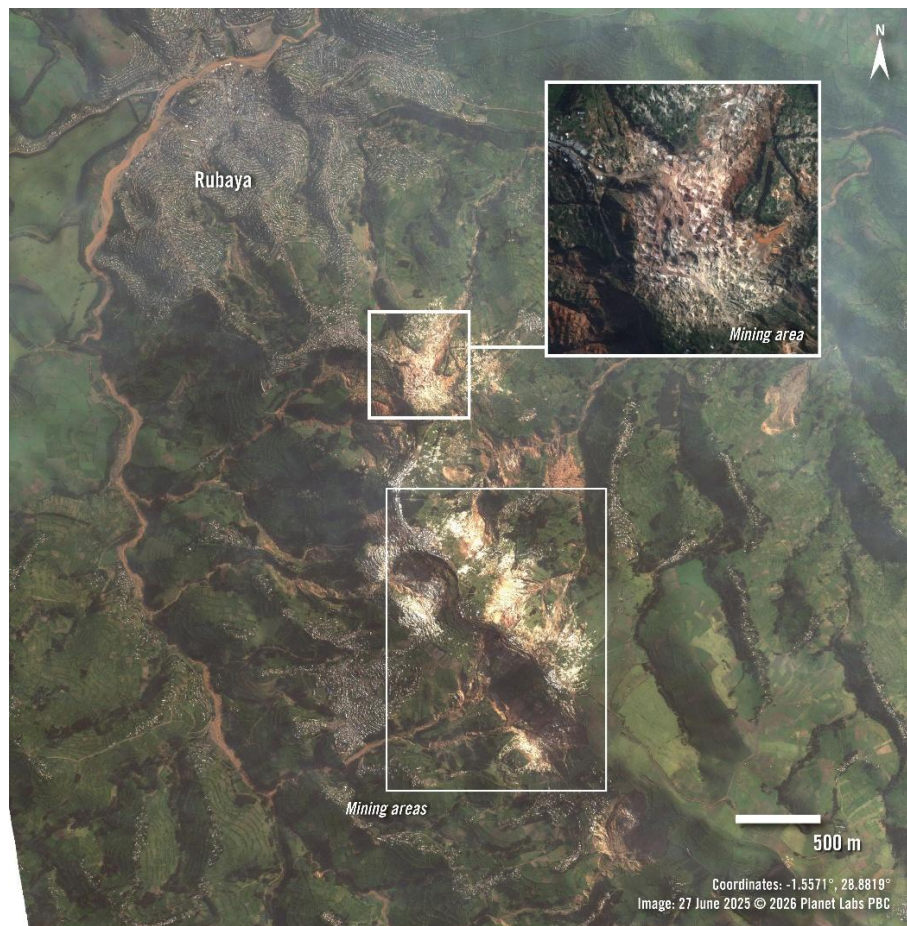
³⁰ Ann Laudati, “Beyond minerals: broadening ‘economies of violence’ in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo”, March 2013, Review of African Political Economy, Volume 40, No. 135, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42003303>.

Dena Montague, “Stolen Goods: Coltan and Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo”, (previously cited).

³¹ Daniel Moran, et. al., “Global Supply Chains of Coltan: A hybrid life cycle assessment study using a social indicator”, 2014, Journal of Industrial Ecology, Volume 00, Number 0, https://folk.nilu.no/~dmor/pdf/MoranMcBainEtAl_JIE_Coltan.pdf.

³² Chris Huggins, “Is collaboration possible between the small scale and large-scale mining sectors? Evidence from ‘Conflict-Free Mining’ in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)”, March 2023, The Extractive Industries and Society, Volume 13, Article 101163, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214790X22001356?via%3Dihub>.

³³ Bloomberg News, “Biggest Congo coltan miner resumes buying after output halt”, <https://www.mining.com/web/biggest-congo-coltan-miner-resumes-buying-output-halt/>, 5 September 2018.



Satellite imagery from 27 June 2025 shows Rubaya, a town in Masisi territory in North Kivu province in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Large amounts of coltan from the mines near Rubaya are trafficked to Rwanda – often with the complicity of Rwandan officials and M23 leaders. © Planet Labs PBC

The DRC government certified the mine as “green” in March 2012 – indicating the minerals mined there do not fund conflict – but revoked the status in June 2012 when members of a mining cooperative working at the site clashed with SMB security guards.³⁴ In 2013, SMB granted Cooperamma, a mining cooperative that represented artisanal miners, the right to operate the mines in exchange for a monopoly on the rights to buy and sell coltan.³⁵ Tensions flared and cooled over the years about access and development between SMB and Cooperamma.³⁶ Monitors from the International Tin Supply Chain Initiative (ITSCI), a due diligence and traceability organization, worked in the mine from 2014 to 2018, which coincided with the rise of DRC’s mining cooperatives. ITSCI suspended, then restarted, its work in Masisi twice between March 2023 and April 2024, before imposing a suspension in May 2024 that remains in place.³⁷

One of the top leaders of M23 in 2012 was Bosco Ntaganda who used his previous ties to armed groups to establish a gold smuggling ring. After internal divisions, Ntaganda left the group and Sultani Makenga

³⁴ Bloomberg News, “Biggest Congo coltan miner resumes buying after output halt”, (previously cited).

³⁵ The Africa Report, “DRC-Rwanda: Rubaya coltan mine at the heart of M23 financing”, <https://www.theafricareport.com/375904/drc-rwanda-rubaya-coltan-mine-at-the-heart-of-m23-financing/>, 6 February 2025.

³⁶ La Prunelle, “Mining in Masisi: SMB informs COOPERAMMA of its process of developing specifications”, <https://laprunelledc.cd/exploitation-mini%C3%A8re-a-masisi-la-smb-informe-la-cooperamma-de-son-processus-de-laboration-dun-cahier-des-charges/>, 4 September 2021; voice call with mining source with experience in Rubaya during SMB’s management of Rubaya mine, 27 February 2026.

³⁷ ITSCI, “ITSCI statement on the mine collapse in Rubaya, Masisi territory”, <https://www.itsci.org/2026/02/06/itsci-statement-on-the-mine-collapse-in-rubaya-masisi-territory/>, 6 February 2026.

eventually took control.³⁸ Makenga attempted to capitalize on Ntaganda's connections with armed groups to benefit from the gold trade.³⁹

The current M23 armed group controlled 45 gold, coltan and cassiterite mines as of September 2025, according to a media report.⁴⁰ These include lucrative gold mining sites in Lomera (Kabare territory), Karhembo (Walungu territory), and Luhwindja (Mwenga territory).⁴¹ Some 85% of miners in eastern DRC work in gold mines, making it by far the most important mineral in eastern DRC.⁴² The UN estimated that after M23 took control of Nzibira, a mineral trading hub that receives minerals from Shabunda territory, particularly cassiterite and coltan, the group controlled almost half of South Kivu's cassiterite and coltan production and more than two thirds of its wolframite output.⁴³

On 3 November 2025, the Congolese minister of mines designated 38 coltan and cassiterite mines in Kalehe and Masisi as "red" status. This included the sites that comprise the Rubaya mine.⁴⁴ The Ministry of Mines said that the red status "formally forbids all extraction and commercialization, signalling to the international community that the minerals from this zone are tainted with human rights violations, forced labour and the presence of armed groups."⁴⁵ The move appeared aimed at curtailing M23's ability to formally sell minerals from Rubaya.

Media reported that the US government, a US businessman with close ties to the Trump Administration, and US companies are interested in minerals from Rubaya, according to a US State Department official.⁴⁶ According to Reuters, DRC offered Washington a shortlist of strategic minerals as part of a mineral's cooperation framework, including coltan from the M23-controlled Rubaya mine.⁴⁷

In South Kivu, thousands of miners flocked to the Lomera mine in late 2024. At least three mining cooperatives were active at the site in early 2025.⁴⁸ Between April and May 2025, M23 forced Congolese mining cooperatives to leave Lomera, angering artisanal miners and mine owners, some of whom had invested large sums of money in machinery, labour and other expenses and accrued large amounts of debt.⁴⁹ M23 fighters initially allowed artisanal miners and mineshaft owners to operate, taxing them a percentage of the value of the soil containing gold they collected. They also charged individuals to use crushers (*concasseurs*), which were used in the early stages of refining soil containing gold. Congolese miners attempted to negotiate with M23 leaders about the increased taxes and fees but failed to find a compromise.⁵⁰

³⁸ Bosco Ntaganda was integrated into the FARDC in 2009 and was involved in the minerals trade as a senior FARDC commander. He facilitated the transport of tons of minerals across the border into Rwanda through a private passage in the border behind his house in Goma; See UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Final report, 2 December 2011, UN Doc S/2011/738, paras. 485, 486, 547, Annex 112.

³⁹ The Enough Project, "Striking Gold: How M23 and its Allies are Infiltrating Congo's Gold Trade", <https://enoughproject.org/files/StrikingGold-M23-and-Allies-Infiltrating-Congo-Gold-Trade.pdf>, October 2013.

⁴⁰ Reuters, "M23 rebels entrench their rule in east Congo even as Trump claims peace", <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/m23-rebels-entrench-their-rule-east-congo-even-trump-claims-peace-2025-12-08/>, 9 December 2025.

⁴¹ Reuters, "M23 rebels entrench their rule in east Congo even as Trump claims peace", (previously cited).

⁴² IPIS, "Analysis of the interactive map of artisanal mining areas in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo," <https://ipisresearch.be/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/IPIS-Analysis-of-the-interactive-map-of-artisanal-mining-areas-in-eastern-Democratic-Republic-of-Congo-2023-update.pdf>, 2023 update.

⁴³ UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, Final report, 30 December 2025, UN Doc S/2025/858, paras. 56-57.

⁴⁴ DRC, Ministry of Mines, Ministry Ordonnance, 3 November 2025, <https://mines.gouv.cd/fr/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/ARRETE-ZONE-ROUGE-ANNEXES.pdf>, annex, page 1.

⁴⁵ Ministère des Mines – RDC, X post : "#RDC _Mines 04.03.26 COMMUNIQUÉ OFFICIEL SUR LA TRAGÉDIE HUMAIN À LA MINE ARTISANALE DE RUBAYA (province du Nord-Kivu)", <https://x.com/MinMinesRDC/status/2029266911943352674>, March 2026.

⁴⁶ Reuters, "US companies eye Congo mining assets, including Rubaya, State Dept official says", <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/us-companies-eye-congo-mining-assets-including-rubaya-state-dept-official-says-2026-04-20/>, 20 April 2026; Reuters, "Inside the mine that feeds the tech world – and funds Congo's rebels", <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/inside-mine-that-feeds-tech-world-funds-congos-rebels-2025-08-13/>, 13 August 2025.

⁴⁷ Reuters, "Exclusive: Congo offers tantalum deposit under M23 control to US in minerals pact, document shows", <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-offers-tantalum-deposit-under-m23-control-us-minerals-pact-document-shows-2026-02-18/>, 18 February 2026.

⁴⁸ Interview by voice call with a Congolese mining representative, 16 January 2026.

⁴⁹ Interview by voice call with a Congolese mining representative, 16 January 2026.

⁵⁰ Interview by voice call with a Congolese mining representative, 16 January 2026.

In late August 2025, M23 killed a miner from Walungu, sparking an uprising by miners against M23's management of the mine, which led to destruction of M23 offices and other structures.⁵¹



Satellite imagery from 18 June 2026 of the Lomera mining site in Kabare territory, South Kivu province, that was established in 2024 along the shores of Lake Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Satellite imagery shows many structures missing in the large mining area and beyond. The areas with high concentrations of clearing are highlighted with yellow arrows. A large boat is also visible along the shore. © Planet Labs PBC

On 8 September 2025, the M23-appointed governor of South Kivu, Patrick Busu Bwa Ngwi Nshombo, accompanied by other M23 officials and security guards, announced to a crowd of miners at Lomera that M23 was closing Lomera for security reasons and asked that everyone at the site register their names and the work they do at the site.⁵² Despite the suspension of operations, artisanal miners bribed M23 fighters for access to the site. In March 2026, M23 told residents who were not originally from the area, but who lived at the Lomera site, that they had to leave the area.⁵³ In the weeks that followed M23 began destroying structures that belonged to residents and building new roads on the site.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Interview by voice call with mining representative 16 January 2026; Interview by voice call with former member of M23 security team, 29 May 2026; DEBOUTRDC.INFO post on X, "Tension à #Lomera/Luhihi: 'Un creuseur tué, un agent de sécurité frappé et les bureaux du mouvement M23 brûlés. Bilan provisoire des tensions tendues à Lomera ce matin du 28 août 2025. Les militaires ne sont pas encore sur terrain pour savoir la suite', témoigne un creuseur", <https://x.com/DEBOUTRDC2/status/1961327683133906956>, 29 August 2026.

⁵² M23, Cabinet du gouverneur de la province du Sud-Kivu, Bukavu, "Identification des exploitants artisanaux un impératif sécuritaire pour la reprise des activités sur le site de Lomera à Luhihi, décision du gouverneur Patrick Busu Bwa Ngwe Nshombo", 8 September 2025. On file with Amnesty International; M23 produced video of M23-appointed governor of South Kivu, Patrick Busu Bwa Ngwe Nshombo, announcing closure of site, on file with Amnesty International.

⁵³ Interview by voice call with Lomera resident, 16 March 2026; photos of destruction of structures, on file with Amnesty International.

⁵⁴ Video of destruction at Lomera site on file with Amnesty International.

4. SUMMARY KILLINGS BY M23 AT MINES

Amnesty International interviewed five victims and family members, a health care worker and a human rights defender who described how they witnessed or had first-hand information about 18 artisanal miners killed by M23 fighters or mine security guards with whom M23 collaborates.⁵⁵ M23 beat 10 victims to death, killed two miners by gunshot at point blank range, and abducted six miners who were later found dead. Other miners told Amnesty International that they had seen artisanal miners die after M23 tortured or beat them, but Amnesty International was unable to confirm their deaths.⁵⁶

Amnesty International spoke with a health care worker and a human rights defender in Masisi who said that between January and March 2026, seven artisanal miners had succumbed to their injuries and died at a health centre after M23 fighters or their collaborators beat them.⁵⁷ In addition, at the time of the call, two diggers were unconscious at the health centre after undergoing severe beatings by M23 fighters, or security guards who patrolled the mine who worked with them, after they asked to take a break and leave the mineshaft in which they were working. Fellow miners had carried them to the health post the day before. When they arrived, they were unable to move or speak. The health care worker believed one had internal haemorrhaging and possibly a broken rib.⁵⁸



An injured miner who was beaten by M23 fighters or their collaborators is carried by fellow miners to receive healthcare. Amnesty International research found that between January and March 2026, M23 or their collaborators severely beat seven artisanal miners who died from their injuries at a health centre.
© Private

Evariste*, a 22-year-old husband and father of a 1-year-old daughter who worked as a miner at Rubaya, was beaten to death in February 2025. Innocent*, told Amnesty International that he, Evariste*, and other miners were returning from work in the mines when they met armed M23 fighters. He said six of them, who were wearing M23 uniforms and spoke Kinyarwanda, started to beat Evariste* because he did not have a token that proved he had participated in community work (*salongo*).⁵⁹ Innocent* was unable to determine with certainty whether the fighters were Rwandan or Congolese. Another digger said that M23 fighters beat Evariste* because he had attempted to sell minerals to an individual who was not authorized by M23. The digger confirmed, however, that Evariste* died after M23 fighters beat him.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Interview by voice call with witnesses (names withheld for security reasons), 23 January, 5 February, 12 February, 9 March, 25 March 2026.

⁵⁶ Interview by voice call with miners, 19 February, 12 March 2026.

⁵⁷ Interview by voice call with health care worker and civil society actor, 12 March 2026.

⁵⁸ Interview by voice call with health care worker and civil society actor, 12 March 2026.

⁵⁹ Interview by voice call with "Innocent" (name changed for security reasons), 9 March 2026.

⁶⁰ Interview by voice call with miner from Rubaya, 19 February 2026.

The M23 fighters took Evariste* to a detention site in Rubaya. Innocent* received a call alerting him that Evariste* was detained. Innocent* said: “When we saw Evariste* he was in so much pain. He didn’t have the strength to speak. He couldn’t lift his feet. His entire body was bloody. He had become red.”⁶¹

The M23 person who oversaw the detention site asked for a ransom of 100,000 Congolese francs (US\$46.25) to release Evariste*. According to Innocent*, he was a Rwandan based on the way he spoke Kinyarwanda. A total of 55,000 Congolese francs (US\$25.43) was collected, and the head of the detention centre allowed the release of Evariste* whereupon he died on the way to the hospital. “Afterward, we didn’t know what to do. Until now, we don’t know what to do or where to go,” Innocent* said.⁶² Innocent* said he suspected that the person in charge of the detention centre released Evariste* with little resistance because he may have suspected that he didn’t have long to live, and he didn’t want him to die there.

The detention centre where Evariste* was detained housed numerous detainees. “We were present when M23 beat them,” said Innocent*. “Four [detainees] were beaten while I was there. They were brought out [of the jail] and their hands were tied. Two [M23 fighters] beat one detainee. When they beat them, they said: If you don’t bring someone from your family to [pay for your release], we will whip you each time. When your family hears the screams, they will come.”⁶³

Not all the M23 detainees had family members to negotiate ransoms. Innocent* said: “One man asked us: ‘Can you look for money to buy [my release] from [M23]? We will make a deal with you. I will work off the debt.’ But we couldn’t find the money to help them.”⁶⁴

M23’s demand for ransoms from detainees is consistent with its ransom demands previously documented by Amnesty International as well as testimonies from other diggers in Rubaya and Lomera.⁶⁵

An artisanal miner in his mid-20s told Amnesty International that he witnessed an individual known as a pit boss, someone who works underground in the mineshafts monitoring artisanal diggers, beat to death his 28-year-old brother in December 2025. Pit bosses collaborated with managers of mineshafts who collaborate with M23. “We were digging, and [my brother] said he was tired, but there was nobody to replace him. He wanted to rest. He was beaten on his chest with a pickaxe by ... When I denounced the man who beat him to death, [M23] put me in prison. They gave me a punishment of two weeks without salary in the mineshaft.”⁶⁶

The digger said M23 detained miners for minor infractions or unknown transgressions. If they couldn’t pay the ransom, M23 took them to Rumangabo or Tchanzou military training centres in Rutshuru.⁶⁷ Beginning in early 2026, he said, M23 started to force detainees to dig for them or their collaborators, often Rwandans, who needed manpower in the mineshafts. Mineshaft bosses, some of whom are Rwandan, may need more than 100 miners in each mineshaft, depending on its size and productivity, the scale of the mining operation, and how many tunnels lead off the main shaft. “The Rwandans in the M23 are the bosses and at the same time, traders (*négociants*). The number of Congolese [bosses] are fewer now. And those who are there, the Rwandans use them. Before [the Rwandans] came, we worked with Congolese Hutu.”⁶⁸

The miner said that when he returned to the surface to tell the mineshaft bosses that his brother had died, “they apprehended me and put me in jail. They gave me a punishment of two weeks without salary in the [mineshaft]. I told people I wanted to take [his body] to our family. He was buried like an animal [in the mineshaft].”

M23 fighters detained a 29-year-old mine operator and three others in June 2025 who worked at Lomera. They detained them at a detention site about 1 km from Lomera. M23 fighters beat each detainee twice a day. Two men from Walungu, among the detainees, lashed out after having been beaten and hit a female

⁶¹ Interview by voice call with “Innocent” (name changed for security reasons), 9 March 2026.

⁶² Interview by voice call with “Innocent” (name changed for security reasons), 9 March 2026.

⁶³ Interview by voice call with “Innocent” (name changed for security reasons), 9 March 2026.

⁶⁴ Interview by voice call with “Innocent” (name changed for security reasons), 9 March 2026.

⁶⁵ Amnesty International, “DRC: They said we would die: M23 and Wazalendo abuses in eastern Congo,” (previously cited); Interview by voice call with two miners from Rubaya, 12 and 19 February 2026; interview by voice call with miner from Lomera, 3 February 2026.

⁶⁶ Interview by voice call with miners from Rubaya, 12 February 2026.

⁶⁷ Interview by voice call with miners from Rubaya, 12 February 2026.

⁶⁸ Interview by voice call with miners from Rubaya, 12 February and 18 April 2026.

M23 fighter. The mine operator said that a Rwandan commander told another fighter: “*Kubita ye*” (to hit or kill in Kinyarwanda). An M23 fighter shot the two miners in the chest, and their dead bodies were dumped in a latrine.⁶⁹

The mine operator said that while he was detained at the detention centre, a young Rwandan woman prepared food at the site. “One day, the woman approached us and asked if we knew the road to Kamembe [Rwanda]. She said: Since I’ve been here, I’ve made nothing.’ I told her that we are next to Lake Kivu. You can cross it to Rwanda. I talked with the girl in order to get to know her boss. She was Rwandan. She confirmed her boss was Rwandan. She was taken from Cyangugu [Rwanda].”⁷⁰

5. TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

“They tied our feet to our arms and started to beat us like you beat a snake.”

Gold trader who worked at Lomera

At the Rubaya and Lomera mining sites, M23 and the security guards with whom they collaborate, tortured and ill-treated miners and others at the sites. Amnesty International interviewed 16 miners or civilians who lived near the mining areas who said that M23 or its security guards had tortured or ill-treated them. Some miners were beaten so badly that they lost consciousness and were taken by fellow miners to hospitals or health centres.

5.1 TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT AT LOMERA MINE

A 38-year-old gold trader who had worked in Lomera for more than two years said that in early December 2025, he was arrested by M23’s mining security guards.⁷¹

“I was outside the mineshaft when it happened. They didn’t want Congolese to mine. They took all they had. M23 soldiers in military uniforms had weapons, and they were with people who they brought with them, security people who were in civilian clothes. They didn’t have weapons.”⁷²

He said the previous men who managed the mine were Congolese, but M23 had chased them away not long after they took Bukavu in February 2025 and brought in Rwandans. He said if M23 and the security guards take pity on the diggers, they allow them to keep a small amount of mineralized sand that may contain some gold that diggers could sell. “If you refuse [to give them what you dug], they hit you.”⁷³

He said M23 fighters beat him and others with whips because he refused to give them soil containing gold that he had purchased from diggers. He said he had nine sacks of soil that were ready for processing. “They told us: ‘We told you it’s forbidden to buy sand. Why are you continuing to buy?’ They said it was not allowed to go to [Lomera], that we don’t have the right to access the site.” M23 fighters took them to a place known as “defence,” an M23 detention site. “They tied our feet to our arms and started to beat us like you beat a snake.” Four M23 fighters took turns beating him with a *torsaday*, a kind of rubber-coated electrical cable.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Interview by voice call with miner from Lomera, 5 February 2026 and 27 May 2026.

⁷⁰ Interview by voice call with miner from Lomera, 5 February 2026.

⁷¹ Interview by voice call with gold trader who worked in Lomera, 25 March 2026.

⁷² Interview by voice call with gold trader who worked in Lomera, 25 March 2026.

⁷³ Interview by voice call with gold trader who worked in Lomera, 25 March 2026.

⁷⁴ Interview by voice call with gold trader who worked in Lomera, 25 March 2026.

“When one got tired, they gave the whip to another,” he said. Their boss gave the order to them. The beating started at 9 am and the victim woke up later that day in a hospital and spent the next month there, recovering from internal haemorrhaging.⁷⁵

The same trader said that beatings by M23 were common. He said he worked with six diggers from Walungu who were abducted by M23 in February 2025 and later found dead. He attended their burial in Nyenyezi, an area near Lomera.⁷⁶

A gold buyer from Lomera said of the security team in the mine there: “They wore vests. They really beat the population ... They beat people to death. They were young men who walked around with sticks. They would arrive at the pits; they came at midnight or 3 a.m. They beat you to take away your minerals, especially if you were in a pit that was reputed to have good sand.”⁷⁷

Claude*, a person with first-hand knowledge of M23’s mine security guards – known as “civil security” – at the Lomera mine in 2025, said the security team was comprised of Rwandans and Congolese. The security guards at the time wore green vests over civilian clothes and were managed by a Rwandan.⁷⁸

“They would bring Tutsis. They were from Gisenyi, Bugarama (Rwanda). They told us this. They had military behaviour, but they were in civilian clothing. They had no weapons, only wooden rods.”⁷⁹

“There were Rwandan military that were also present at the site. We feared them.”⁸⁰ He said in late August 2025, M23 beat to death a miner from Walungu, sparking an uprising.⁸¹ Amnesty International was unable to confirm the events surrounding the miner’s death.⁸²

“Frankly, it was catastrophic,” Claude* said. “The miners were beaten. If they made the smallest mistake, they were beaten. Some of them lost their lives. They were [Rwandans] who did the beating. They used wooden rods.” He said that M23 often placed compliant Congolese in positions of responsibility at the mine, but they were controlled by M23 or Rwandans.⁸³

A mining supervisor who worked at the Lomera gold mine said that not long after M23 came to the Lomera site in March 2025, M23 fighters attacked one of his employees. “When we got out of the mineshaft with the mineralized sand, there were five well-armed [M23 fighters] and three who were not armed. They said: “We didn’t come to play. If you resist [giving us the mineralized sand], we will kill you.”⁸⁴

“[A miner] told M23 fighters and those with them how he had suffered all night so he could have some money for his kids to eat. One of the fighters stabbed him in his eye. The others loaded bullets into the chambers of their weapons. They told [seven diggers] to lie flat on the ground. They were tied up.”⁸⁵

M23 fighters took the miners to a detention site near Lomera where they had dug a large hole in which detainees were held. “They threw people into the hole. You could see the tops of the heads of people. They put a tarpaulin over the top of it. There were around 40 [detainees] in the hole. Eight or nine M23 guarded it.”⁸⁶

“I paid the [ransom] so they would be released. The [one who was stabbed], I paid for a moto to take him to Fomulac Hospital [general reference hospital] in Katana.”

⁷⁵ Interview by voice call with gold trader who worked in Lomera, 25 March 2026.

⁷⁶ Interview by voice call with gold trader who worked in Lomera, 25 March 2026.

⁷⁷ Interview with gold buyer in Lomera, 6 February 2026.

⁷⁸ Interview by voice call with Claude*, (name changed for security reasons) 23 January and 29 May 2026.

⁷⁹ Interview by voice call with Claude*, person with first-hand knowledge of Lomera security guards, 23 January 2026; interview by voice call with miner who worked at Lomera, 13 February 2026.

⁸⁰ Interview by voice call with Claude*, 23 January 2026 (previously cited).

⁸¹ Interview by voice call with mining representative 16 January 2026; Interview by voice call with “Claude”, 29 May 2026 (previously cited); DEBOUTRDC.INFO post on X, “Tension à #Lomera/Luhihi: « Un creuseur tué, un agent de sécurité frappé et les bureaux du mouvement M23 brûlés. Bilan provisoire des tensions tendues à Lomera ce matin du 28 août 2025. Les militaires ne sont pas encore sur terrain pour savoir la suite », témoigne un creuseur”, <https://x.com/DEBOUTRDC2/status/1961327683133906956>, 29 August 2026.

⁸² Interview by voice call with Claude*, 23 January 2026 (previously cited).

⁸³ Interview by voice call with Claude*, 23 January 2026 (previously cited).

⁸⁴ Interview by voice call with miner who worked at Lomera, 13 February 2026.

⁸⁵ Interview by voice call with miner who worked at Lomera, 13 February 2026.

⁸⁶ Interview by voice call with “Claude”, 23 January 2026 (previously cited).

A 29-year-old man mine operator who worked at Lomera in 2025 (see section 4, Summary Killings by M23 at Mines) said that he was detained at night in late June 2025 because M23 suspected him of communicating with authorities in Kinshasa and being linked to the Wazalendo. “I heard someone talking outside in Kinyarwanda. There were four of us. I heard them say in Kinyarwanda that if they found images of rebels in our phone, they would kill us. I’m in several WhatsApp groups. We have groups of [mineshaft owners] and groups of diggers. If they found this, I would die. I hid my phone in my underwear.”⁸⁷



A miner who worked at the Lomera mine shows the injuries he received after M23 fighters beat him in June 2025. © Private

M23 handcuffed him and the others and took them to a detention centre nearby. “We met others [in the detention centre]. They had also been taken by force. They took people and they were mistreated with whips. There were more than 50 of us at the jail.”⁸⁸ He said there were multiple small wooden buildings that each had rooms about 3 meters square. “We were in a small cell with 10 people. There was a cell for diggers, a cell for thieves.” M23 fighters beat him in the morning and at night, each time 80 blows, and he was forced to count them aloud. The supervisor of the jail, a man he said was Rwandan, told him: “I will kill you and then give you a weapon and say you were Wazalendo.”⁸⁹

“During the two days I was there, I saw the same soldiers. They arrive between 7:30 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. They say: Get on the ground. They say they are going to give you your morning tea [beatings with wooden rods]. [Any kind of abuse] is allowed. The pain is beyond the senses. They hit you and they don’t even look at you. They hit you all over, like an animal. The boss was always there. He insulted us. He used Kinyarwanda terms, like *bicucu* [idiots in Kinyarwanda].”⁹⁰

A woman from an area near Lomera told Amnesty International that two members of the “security guards” in the area beat her in March 2026. The head of the security guards in the area, who collaborates with M23, was with a young woman and a young man, part of the security guards. After she had a dispute with the head of security, the two young people started beating her with sticks. “They were armed (with guns) and wooden rods. Each security has a wooden rod. They used a big stick to hit me while I was sitting down. When I started to yell, he told them to hit me. When I started to yell again; he told them to hit me. He thought I wasn’t a native of the area. The girl, it was like she didn’t understand Swahili. She talked to [the head security guard] in Kinyarwanda. They hit me almost everywhere on my body – my head, my backside.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Interview by voice call with miner from Lomera, 5 February 2026 and 27 May 2026.

⁸⁸ Interview by voice call with mine operator from Lomera, 5 February 2026.

⁸⁹ Interview by voice call with mine operator from Lomera, 5 February 2026.

⁹⁰ Interview by voice call with mine operator from Lomera, 5 February 2026.

⁹¹ Interview by voice call with victim, 16 March 2026.



A security guard who works for a company that collaborates with M23 at the Lomera gold mining site in Kabare territory, South Kivu Province, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. © Private

A digger from Lomera said that when he was working at the site last year: “Each Saturday, (M23) forced people to go to the training in Rumangabo. All people who had been arrested were sent to the training, without consulting them, without their opinion. They brought trucks. They said this openly.”⁹²

5.2 TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT AT RUBAYA MINE

Torture also took place at the Rubaya mine. A miner who had worked at Rubaya for almost five years said that M23 beat and detained him in February 2026 because he did not participate in *salongo*. “There were five [M23 fighters] in uniforms and they were armed. They took me to Kanyenzuki. It’s to the west of Rubaya. [The detention centre] was a small wooden house. A hole had been dug. The hole is inside the house. It’s like a pit. That’s where they put people, so they pay a lot [to be released]. There were 20 of us in the pit. They beat us a lot. They all spoke Kinyarwanda. I was beaten 30 (blows) in the morning. Thirty (blows) in the afternoon. And 40 (blows) at night. My arms and legs were tied up with a cord so I couldn’t escape and beaten on the backside. I was beaten with a stick. Five M23 fighters beat me; they said I should pay money and free myself. They beat us until we became like sick people. Some [detainees] became handicapped [after M23 beat them]. Some of them had their arms or fingers broken. I don’t think they will be able to work anymore.”⁹³

M23 released the victim the next day after he paid a ransom of about US\$32. Amnesty was unable to verify how long M23 detained the others but based on testimonies from detainees at other M23 detention sites, they were likely released after they paid ransoms.

Another digger from Rubaya who was arrested for not taking part in *salongo*, said: “When they beat me, I was tied up. My arms and legs were tied so I couldn’t escape. Two [of the M23 fighters] had wooden rods. The others held their weapons. They said also: If we don’t buy our [freedom], they are going to take us to Tchanzou for a military training.”⁹⁴

⁹² Interview by voice call with former miner in Lomera, 10 February 2026.

⁹³ Interview by voice call with miner from Rubaya, 19 February 2026.

⁹⁴ Interview by voice call with miner in Rubaya, 19 February 2026.

A 30-year-old digger from Rubaya told Amnesty International that after spending a week underground digging coltan, he asked for permission to go see his family. He estimated there were more than 150 diggers working together in the tunnel. The mineshaft boss, who was responsible for giving them food, only provided two *mandazi* [a kind of sweet fried dough] and a cup of milk each day. “We worked night and day. We slept two hours per night.”⁹⁵

He had come to an agreement with the mineshaft boss, a Congolese man, that he would be paid 70,000 Congolese francs for a week of work [a little more than US\$30]. Instead, the boss, who he said collaborated with M23, instructed the 12 “security” guards to beat the digger. “There are only civilians [in the quarry] who are in control of the security and who are controlled by [M23]. They all had wooden rods. When they beat me, they weren’t wearing military uniforms, [but] sometimes, they wear military uniforms.”⁹⁶

“After they beat me, [the boss] gave me 10,000 Congolese francs (US\$4.31) and said that if I come back, they would kill me.”⁹⁷ He said some of the other diggers also wanted a break, but after seeing or hearing about his beating, they were afraid to ask for permission to leave.⁹⁸

He spent three days receiving medical care. “I met three other people who were [receiving care] who had been beaten who were in other mineshafts.”⁹⁹

The miner’s testimony of abusive security guards aligns with those of nine other miners whom Amnesty International interviewed who confirmed that the mine security guards in Rubaya and Lomera collaborated closely with M23.¹⁰⁰

M23 also used threats of forced recruitment against miners in Rubaya and Lomera. Amnesty International interviewed seven artisanal miners – four from Lomera and three from Rubaya – and received information from a miner from Ngungu, who said M23 fighters threatened them with forced recruitment if they didn’t pay ransoms or comply with M23 orders.¹⁰¹ Other miners said they knew fellow miners who had been sent to Rumangabo or Tchanzou military training centres.

The miner in his mid-20s whose brother was killed in Rubaya (See previous section) told Amnesty International that after reporting his brother’s death, he was sent to an M23 detention site in Rubaya. He, along with around three dozen others, was detained in a shipping container, joining dozens of other detainees already there. He said M23 brought new detainees to the containers during the night. Others who had previously been detained were taken away and forced to dig for M23 or their collaborators. He only stayed in the container one day before M23 fighters took him to the mine to dig.¹⁰²

He said working in the mineshaft was physically difficult. “There’s a lot of gas in the mineshafts,” he said.¹⁰³ “If you aren’t used to this, you are going to die. There are pipes that bring oxygen into the mineshafts, but there aren’t enough pipes for the number of people in the mineshaft. I was in the pit for two weeks and four days. The boss saw that I had lost my older brother and allowed me to escape.”¹⁰⁴ He said that despite digging at Rubaya since he was 13 years old, he wants to leave the profession. “There’s a lot of torture and kidnapping.”¹⁰⁵

A 25-year-old digger from Rubaya said that last year, M23 fighters detained miners and sent some of them to Tchanzou. M23 uses a shipping container as a detention centre located on the road to Rubaya at Nyange and two other shipping containers near about 10 to 15 kilometres from Rubaya. An individual from the area said M23 detains miners in the containers, and he has heard the screams of detainees as they are being

⁹⁵ Interview by voice call with miner in Rubaya, 9 April 2026.

⁹⁶ Interview by voice call with miner in Rubaya, 9 April 2026.

⁹⁷ Interview by voice call with miner in Rubaya, 9 April 2026.

⁹⁸ Interview by voice call with miner in Rubaya, 9 April 2026.

⁹⁹ Interview by voice call with miner in Rubaya, 9 April 2026.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with miners, 3, 13, 17, 23, February 2026; 9, 25 March 2026; a civilian who lived near Lomera, 16 March 2026; a mining representative from Lomera, 16 January 2026; a gold buyer from Lomera, 6 February 2026.

¹⁰¹ Interview by voice call with miners from Lomera, Rubaya; 3, 5, 10, 12 February 2026 (two miners), 19 February 2026; 2 March 2026; information from miner in Ngungu, December 2025.

¹⁰² Interview by voice call with two miners from Rubaya, 12 February 2026.

¹⁰³ Carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, methane, and other gases are often found at lower levels of mine shafts.

¹⁰⁴ Interview by voice call with miner from Rubaya, 12 February 2026.

¹⁰⁵ Interview by voice call with miner from Rubaya, 12 February 2026.

tortured. “It’s better to die than being detained there,” he said, referring to the brutality of the beatings detainees receive.



M23 uses a red shipping container in Nyange – a settlement near Rubaya – and two other shipping containers about 10 to 15 kilometres from Rubaya to detain miners from Rubaya, the largest coltan mine in Masisi territory in North Kivu province in Democratic Republic of Congo. M23 fighters often require detainees to pay large ransoms for their release. M23 has controlled Rubaya since April 2024. Large amounts of coltan from Rubaya is smuggled to Rwanda. © Private

The 25-year-old digger from Rubaya said: “Now, [M23] take people and put them in the mineshaft. After the New Year [they stopped sending people to Tchanzou]. There are a lot of bosses who came from Rwanda who are looking for coltan. And there was a lack of diggers; a lot had been sent to Tchanzou.”¹⁰⁶

M23 appears to use this strategy at other mines it controls. A miner in Ngungu told a local human rights defender that M23 works in two ways: The group imposes “fines” or “taxes” on miners – an amount that they can’t pay – so they are forced to work for them to pay it off. Or M23 fighters detain people who haven’t participated in community work and demand a huge fine. “If you can’t pay the fine and you are in jail, you are forced to decide between going to Tchanzou in Rutshuru or digging minerals [for M23].”¹⁰⁷

6. FORCED LABOUR

“If the diggers work well, they aren’t beaten. If they don’t, they are whipped.”

Miner who worked at Rubaya for 12 years

Amnesty International found that M23 forced detainees at mining sites to work off fines – often so exorbitant that miners could not afford them – through forced labour. At other times, miners were detained for no apparent reason and forced to dig minerals in M23 mineshafts or the mineshafts of their collaborators.

A 35-year-old miner who had worked more than 10 years at Rubaya said: “[M23] forces you to dig for them. They beat people to make them go into mineshafts. When you come out of the mineshaft, they take you by force and give you an insufficient amount [of money] for what you dug for three or four days. They pay you what they want.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Interview by voice call with miner in Rubaya, 12 February 2026.

¹⁰⁷ Confidential report on M23 human rights abuses in Ngungu from Congolese human rights defender, December 2025.

¹⁰⁸ Interview by voice call with Rubaya miner, 12 February 2026.

“If the shaft produces well, [M23] sends a pit boss inside the mineshaft with the diggers. The mineshaft bosses are civilians. There are delegates in each shaft. They are like bosses. If the diggers work well, they aren’t beaten. If they don’t, they are whipped. If I leave and explain this to M23, they say nothing. Their objective is to make money. They don’t care about beatings. I was in the shaft for three days, night and day. If you tell them that you are going to rest, they beat you. There are some who have died because of being beaten.”¹⁰⁹

Others are forced to work for no pay. A 30-year-old digger told Amnesty International that men in civilian clothes with pistols who spoke Kinyarwanda abducted him and other young men who were hanging out in an area outside Rubaya. He said they were taken to a mineshaft in Rubaya where “most of the mineshaft bosses are Rwandan. We spent [almost] a week, six days [in the mineshaft]. I was exhausted, and I tried to leave. The boss said: If you are tired, you won’t get [paid]. He ordered us to return to the shaft. We refused. Because we refused, [his men] beat us. The mineshaft boss gave the order. Two young men held our arms. Two held our legs. And they put a chair over our heads [to prevent them from moving]. Then he hit us anywhere, legs, backsides, all over. They said [in Kinyarwanda]: ‘You will feel the pain.’”¹¹⁰

A digger from Rubaya in his 40s summed it up like this: “[M23] knows they aren’t going to pay you, but they promise to pay you, so you’ll work with energy. When you get tired, they beat you [and don’t pay you].”¹¹¹

Amnesty International also interviewed two miners from Rubaya and received information from two civil society activists who had interviewed four individuals in Rubaya and Ngungu that revealed how M23 fighters use *salongo*, a traditional form of community work that has become essentially compulsory under M23, to inflict punishment and collect ransoms from individuals.¹¹²

The 20-year-old miner [see section 5.2, Torture and ill-treatment at Rubaya mine] who was taken to Kanyenzuki and detained in a pit with 20 other detainees, said: “I was beaten 30 [blows] in the morning. Thirty in the afternoon. And 40 at night. They didn’t give us food. Only our families brought food, and only after we paid would they let us eat. We paid 10,000 Congolese francs (US\$4.32) [for access to food].”¹¹³

He said that the work done during *salongo*, which was traditionally done to benefit the community, largely benefited M23. “Other than the maintenance of the road, which the vehicles on the road can be ours, it’s all for them.” He said the soil dug during *salongo* belongs to M23. The detainees also dug trenches that M23 fighters hide in during bombing raids and the holes for the pits in which detainees are held. He said they put concrete on top of some holes or trenches to fortify them.¹¹⁴

He paid 75,000 Congolese francs (US\$33) ransom to M23 to be released the next day.

7. PILLAGE OF MINERALS

Prior to the 2025 arrival of M23 in South Kivu, private businessmen and armed groups used well established smuggling routes for minerals to Rwanda. A 2025 report by the International Peace Information Service (IPIS) found that coltan from the South Kivu territories of Mwenga and Shabunda arrived in Bukavu and were then ferried across Lake Kivu to Rwanda at night by motorized boats.¹¹⁵ A Rwandan boat owner said that boats full of pigs and goats crossed from Rwanda to Bukavu and, on the return trip, left with minerals, including coltan.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ Interview by voice call with Rubaya miner, 12 February 2026.

¹¹⁰ Interview by voice call with Rubaya miner, 24 March 2026.

¹¹¹ Interview by voice call with Rubaya miner, 24 March 2026.

¹¹² Interview by voice call with Rubaya miner, 19 February and 24 March 2026; Confidential reports on M23 human rights abuses in Ngungu and Rubaya from Congolese human rights defenders, December 2025; africa-info.cd, “Nyiragongo: le Salongo détourné en outil de répression sous le contrôle du M23,” <https://www.africa-infos.cd/2025/10/02/nyiragongo-le-salongo-detourne-en-outil-de-repression-sous-le-contrôle-du-m23/>, le 2 October 2025.

¹¹³ Interview by voice call with Rubaya miner, 19 February 2026.

¹¹⁴ Interview by voice call with Rubaya miner, 19 February 2026.

¹¹⁵ IPIS, “La contrebande du coltan du Sud-Kivu vers le Rwanda Les routes, les facteurs et sa mise en œuvre”, https://ipisresearch.be/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/20250715_Voix-du-Congo_Coltan-South-Kivu.pdf, 2025.

¹¹⁶ IPIS, “La contrebande du coltan du Sud-Kivu vers le Rwanda Les routes, les facteurs et sa mise en œuvre”, https://ipisresearch.be/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/20250715_Voix-du-Congo_Coltan-South-Kivu.pdf, 2025.

Amnesty International interviewed seven miners, mining representatives, and others who worked at Lomera who confirmed that soil containing gold from Lomera was loaded onto boats at the Port of Lomera.¹¹⁷ Sources in Rwanda confirmed that soil containing gold from DRC is transported by road and via Lake Kivu to Rwanda. The soil is transported to a “sand port” in Kamembe, a town in Rwanda’s Rusizi district in Western province. The sand port is an area on the shore of Lake Kivu where sand is typically deposited for use in construction. In addition, sources in Rwanda confirmed that motorized speed boats from Rwanda accompanied boats to Kamembe’s sand port where sacks of mineralized sand are unloaded.



Satellite imagery from 18 February 2026 shows the Kamembe sand port in Kamembe, Rwanda. The port is typically used as a collection point for sand used in construction. Amnesty International research found that boats, accompanied by motorboats from Rwanda, delivered soil containing gold to the sand port. From there, it was distributed to other locations in Rwanda for processing. © Google / Airbus 2026

Rwandan sources confirmed that double cabin pickups or other vehicles transport 50-kilogram sacks of soil from the sand port in Kamembe to an unknown destination. One eyewitness confirmed seeing vehicles carrying untreated soil to a location in Kamembe known as Kacyangugu, a hill in Kamembe where a police station is located. Amnesty International was unable to confirm if the unprocessed soil came from Lomera or where the soil containing gold was taken after it left Kamembe and Kacyangugu.¹¹⁸ A source in Kamembe confirmed that no Rwandan minerals pass through Kamembe’s sand port; all come from DRC.¹¹⁹

Two miners who worked at Lomera told Amnesty International that they saw men from Lomera loading sacks full of soil containing gold onto a boat that had docked in Lomera. One of them said: “I was there at night. I hid and saw that [M23] sent three groups. They sent them to different mineshafts. They took the mineralized sand and took it near the lake. There are boats there. When they arrived, they put it in small boats and sent it to Rwanda. Forty people came down with sacks. One sack might be 25 to 30 kilos of mineralized sand.”¹²⁰

A mining representative who worked at Lomera in 2025 confirmed the presence of boats at Lomera’s port that are loaded with soil containing gold.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Interview by voice call with miners, a mining representative, and others who worked at Lomera, 16 January, 5 February, 10 February, 13 February, 2 March, 25 March 2026.

¹¹⁸ Information collected in Rwanda in March 2026 through interviews with eyewitnesses and other confidential sources, on file with Amnesty International.

¹¹⁹ Information collected in Rwanda in March 2026 (previously cited).

¹²⁰ Interview by voice call with miner who worked in Lomera, 10 February 2026.

¹²¹ Interview by voice call with mining representative 16 January 2026.



A Satellite imagery from 4 February 2026 shows the Lomera mining site along the shores of Lake Kivu in South Kivu province in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Sand containing gold mined at Lomera is loaded on boats docked at Lomera. Gold from artisanal mines in South Kivu is illicitly sent to Rwanda. © Planet Labs PBC

Another miner from Lomera said: “I saw this myself. We saw [boats being loaded]. Loaded with *robotas* [sacks of soil containing gold]. They did this very early in the morning. Each morning, they came with traders from Rwanda. And the same boats came at night. I know personally the people who loaded the boats.”¹²²

Another miner from Lomera said that he worked for between two and three weeks in March 2026 for a Rwandan who collaborated with M23. “[The Rwandan said]: ‘A part of [the sand] is sold on site [in DRC]; another part of it is loaded on the boat. The boat goes to Kamembe. [In Rwanda], there is a good refining process of the sand, better than in Lomera. Part of it goes to Kamembe. And another part goes to Ishungu [a town south of Lomera in DRC].’”¹²³

The same miner who worked for the Rwandan said: “[The Rwandan] was the boss of five mineshafts. We were a team of five. When I asked for [the percentage of sand that was promised me], he said if he sees me again, he’ll shoot me.”¹²⁴

Amnesty International’s Crisis Evidence Lab verified the location of a photo that showed a boat docked at the Port of Lomera. The photograph shows transporters carrying *robotas* on to the boat, which are believed to contain soil containing gold, according to witnesses.¹²⁵

¹²² Interview by voice call with miner operator from Lomera 13 February 2026.

¹²³ Interview by voice call with miner who worked in Lomera, 9 March 2026.

¹²⁴ Interview by voice call with miner who worked in Lomera, 9 March 2026.

¹²⁵ Photo on file with Amnesty International.



Men load sacks of soil – known as robotas – that contain gold on to a boat docked at the port of Lomera, a gold mining site in Kabare territory, South Kivu province, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Much of the gold from artisanal mines in South Kivu is illicitly sent to Rwanda. © Private

On 25 June, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control imposed sanctions on four entities, including Gasabo Gold Refinery LTD, a Rwandan gold refinery in the capital Kigali, which the Treasury department said, "has acted as a key partner to Rwandan government officials and M23 rebels as they sourced and transported gold out of eastern DRC. Following the removal of gold from mines in RDF/M23-occupied areas in South Kivu, Rwandan government forces have had strict oversight of the gold until it reached Gasabo Gold. RDF soldiers and M23 rebels have ensured the safe transport of gold from M23-held areas to Rusizi District, Rwanda, immediately over the border from Bukavu, DRC, to Gasabo Gold in Kigali, Rwanda, via ground or air transport."¹²⁶ In addition, the US Treasury sanctioned the chairman of Gasabo Gold Refinery LTD and its general manager.¹²⁷

The Rwanda National Bank's 2024-2025 annual report stated that the value of gold exports had increased dramatically in recent years, jumping from US\$772.03 million USD in fiscal year 2022-2023 to US\$1.26 billion in fiscal year 2024-2025, an increase of 63.3%.¹²⁸

Amnesty International did not investigate the illicit transport of coltan from Rubaya to Rwanda. The UN Group of Experts on the DRC, however, found that after M23 took over the Rubaya mine on 30 April 2024, M23 "controlled trading centres in Rubaya and Mushaki, as well as mineral transport routes from Rubaya to Rwanda, where Rubaya minerals were mixed with Rwanda production." The report noted that it constituted "the largest contamination of mineral supply chains in the Great Lakes region to date."¹²⁹

Moreover, the UN Group of Experts noted in its 2025 report that RDF sources and sources close to the Rwandan government reported that the final objective of Kigali was to "control the territory of Democratic Republic of the Congo and its natural resources."¹³⁰

¹²⁶ United States, Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Rwandan Gold Refinery and Network Enabling Conflict Minerals Trade", 25 June 2026, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0543>.

¹²⁷ United States, Department of Treasury, (previously cited).

¹²⁸ Rwanda National Bank, Rwandan's Exports, https://www.bnr.rw/documents/Annual_Report_2024_25_English_Full_Version_H3MVurT.pdf (accessed 9 July 2026), "Appendix 15".

¹²⁹ UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, Midterm report, 27 December 2024, UN Doc S/2024/969, Summary page 2, paras. 56, 57.

¹³⁰ UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, Final report, 3 July 2025, UN Doc S/2025/446, para. 43.

Amnesty International interviewed miners working in Rubaya who said that certain traders and mineshaft bosses, some of whom had armed escorts, were Rwandan based on the presence of guards, their inability to speak Swahili, and the way they spoke Kinyarwanda.¹³¹ A miner who works at Rubaya said that the supervisor of his boss is a Rwandan woman who makes regular trips to Rwanda.¹³² Amnesty International was unable to establish the identities or for whom the Rwandan mine operators at Rubaya worked. However, a Rwandan who works at Rubaya said that some of the Rwandans working at the site were civilians while others were Rwandans who fought with M23 when needed but often wore civilian clothes and worked as mine operators.¹³³ Miners said that regardless of their affiliation, access to Rubaya is only possible through close collaboration with M23.

Rwandan president Paul Kagame has presented mixed messages on Rwanda's involvement in the trafficking on DRC minerals. He said in 2024 that Rwanda was a transit point for DRC minerals, including gold.¹³⁴ More recently, however, he has said that Rwanda is not interested in DRC's minerals.¹³⁵ "It can't be seen that [all] gold we export is coming from DR Congo," Kagame said in an interview in December 2025.¹³⁶

Since M23 captured Goma, Rwandan border officials have allowed coltan traffickers to pass through official Rwandan border posts where Rwandan officials have at times recorded shipments.¹³⁷ In addition, traders pay M23-imposed taxes on coltan: \$4 per kilogram is paid to M23 and \$3 per kilogram to the Rwanda government.¹³⁸

The value of Rwanda's coltan exports increased from US\$81.63 million in fiscal year 2022-2023 to US\$110.43 million in fiscal year 2024-2025, an increase of 35.2%.¹³⁹



A rock containing coltan from a mining site in Rubaya, Democratic Republic of Congo. © Private

Rwanda's imports and exports of coltan vary widely, depending on the sources. International databases¹⁴⁰ reported that tantalum imports from Rwanda between January and June 2025 were 3,839 tons, a 213%

¹³¹ Interview by voice call with miners in Rubaya, 12 February, 24 March 2026; exchange with human rights defender 29 May 2026.

¹³² Exchange with human rights defender 29 May 2026.

¹³³ Information received from confidential source in Rubaya, 13 July 2026.

¹³⁴ Panafricanlifestyle, TikTok post: "Kagame admits to DRC mineral smuggling through Rwanda", 27 February 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqI91CphSXk>

¹³⁵ Kigali Today, "If we were in Congo for minerals, we would be 100 times richer" – Kagame", 6 February 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iV7yFsJoEqc>; The Star Kenya, "Rwanda's Kagame calls Tshisekedi 'spoiled child', we're not looking for minerals in DRC", 6 February 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APDJrCBJFW0>.

¹³⁶ Al Jazeera, "Kagame: 'Never seen this much attention' to ending Africa war" <https://www.aljazeera.com/video/the-bottom-line/2025/12/7/kagame-never-seen-this-much-attention-to-ending-africa-war>, 7 December 2025.

¹³⁷ Global Witness, "Who buys Rwanda's smuggled coltan? The global journey of conflict coltan from DRC to the world's electronics", (previously cited).

¹³⁸ Global Witness, "Who buys Rwanda's smuggled coltan? The global journey of conflict coltan from DRC to the world's electronics", (previously cited).

¹³⁹ Rwanda National Bank, Rwandan's Exports, https://www.bnr.rw/documents/Annual_Report_2024_25_English_Full_Version_H3MVurT.pdf (accessed 9 July 2026), "Appendix 15".

¹⁴⁰ Publicly available UN Comtrade and the World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution.

increase compared with the same period in 2024.¹⁴¹ However, ITSCI preliminary 2025 data found that tantalite exports from Rwanda decreased about 12%, dropping from 1,225 tons between January and June 2024 to 1,078 tons during the same period in 2025.¹⁴²

8. LEGAL ANALYSIS

Amnesty International has previously determined that the conflict in eastern DRC between M23 and the DRC is a non-international armed conflict, while it determined that there is a parallel international armed conflict between the DRC and Rwanda.¹⁴³ Rwanda, as a party to the international armed conflict, and M23, as a party to a non-international armed conflict, are both obligated to respect international humanitarian law (IHL), including the prohibition of murder of civilians; enforced disappearances; and arbitrary deprivation of liberty.¹⁴⁴ The cases illustrated in this briefing indicate that M23 is not adhering to IHL or respecting the right to life, and right to family life, which includes an obligation to inform family members about whether their relative is being detained or has been killed.¹⁴⁵ They also provide a reasonable basis for concluding that the M23 is committing the war crimes of violence to life and person, cruel and inhuman treatment, hostage-taking and pillaging.¹⁴⁶

While Amnesty International was not able to definitively determine who the Rwandans at Rubaya worked for, if these individuals are Rwandan military or Rwanda government personnel, Rwanda bears direct state responsibility, and its officials, international criminal responsibility, for these acts. Rwanda may also bear state responsibility for these acts if these individuals are acting under the direction or control of the State, even if they are not directly employed by Rwanda.

Regardless of the identity of these Rwandans, Rwanda is obligated to ensure that minerals taken from the DRC mines are not smuggled into Rwanda, that no government or military personnel are complicit in these mining operations and crimes, and that any Rwandans participating in these crimes are held accountable in fair trials meeting international standards.

Under IHL, uncompensated or abusive forced labour during conflict is prohibited.¹⁴⁷ Despite claims of commitment to IHL,¹⁴⁸ M23 fighters, and fighters and collaborators identified by witnesses as Rwandans, are forcing miners to dig coltan or gold for them, which is a violation of IHL and likely amounts to war crimes.

Amnesty International documented in this briefing how M23, and fighters and collaborators that witnesses identified as Rwandans, frequently subject civilians, including artisanal miners and others who work at mining sites, to torture, cruel treatment and outrages upon their personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment against detainees. All these acts are prohibited under IHL and likely amount to war crimes. Common Article 3 of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Article 50/51/130/147 of the Geneva Conventions I-IV, respectively, clearly prohibit cruel treatment such as torture, mutilation or any form of corporal punishment against civilians, and persons who ceased to take part in hostilities.¹⁴⁹

Moreover, the detention of artisanal miners by M23 and by individuals identified by witnesses as Rwandans, with the intent to force them or a third-party to pay a ransom for their release, constitutes hostage taking and

¹⁴¹ ITSCI, "ITSCI statement: Shifts in tantalum mineral flows from the Great Lakes Region", <https://www.itsci.org/2025/11/12/itsci-statement-shifts-in-tantalum-mineral-flows-from-the-great-lakes-region/>, 12 November 2025.

¹⁴² ITSCI, "ITSCI statement: Shifts in tantalum mineral flows from the Great Lakes Region", <https://www.itsci.org/2025/11/12/itsci-statement-shifts-in-tantalum-mineral-flows-from-the-great-lakes-region/>, 12 November 2025.

¹⁴³ Amnesty International, "They said we would die: M23 and Wazalendo abuses in eastern Congo (previously cited).

¹⁴⁴ ICRC, Customary IHL: Rule 89. Violence to Life, Rule 98. Enforced Disappearance, and Rule 99 Deprivation of Liberty.

¹⁴⁵ ICRC, Customary IHL: Rule 105. Respect for Family Life, Rule 98. Enforced Disappearance, and Rule 117. Accounting for Missing Persons.

¹⁴⁶ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 8 (2) (c) (i), (iii) and (v).

¹⁴⁷ ICRC, Customary IHL: Rule 95, Forced labour.

¹⁴⁸ Lawrence Kanyuka X post: "Démenti Officiel", 5 June 2026, <https://x.com/LawrenceKanyuka/status/2062806114295582943>

¹⁴⁹ See ICRC, International Humanitarian Law Databases, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gcii-1949/article-3>. See also: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/apii-1977/article-4>.

likely amounts to a war crime.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, their threatening or forcibly compelling detainees to serve in its armed movement is a human rights abuse.¹⁵¹

M23's plunder of gold and coltan may amount to pillage. Given the significant amounts of gold and coltan illicitly trafficked to Rwanda – often with the complicity of Rwandan and M23 leaders –, it is likely that Rwanda is itself directly engaged in pillaging the resources of the DRC. Pillage – the forcible taking of private property or destruction during armed conflict or occupation – is prohibited under the Hague Regulations and the Fourth Geneva Convention under Additional Protocol II.¹⁵² In Lomera, for example, M23, and individuals whom witnesses identified as Rwandans, appropriated natural resources, without the consent of the property owners or those who paid to have access to the land, and deprived them of their access to the mineshafts when they closed the mine in September 2025. The act of illegally appropriating the gold in the context of an armed conflict may amount to the war crime of pillage.



Structures belonging to civilians destroyed by M23 in April 2026 at the Lomera mining site in South Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of Congo. © Private

8.1 CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

International standards establish clear expectations for states and companies to prevent and address human rights harms linked to mining activities. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UN Guiding Principles) affirm that states must enforce laws requiring companies to respect human rights and ensure accountability for abuses.¹⁵³ The UN Guiding Principles also make clear that all companies have a responsibility to respect human rights wherever they operate.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ ICRC, Customary IHL Rule 96, Hostage-taking.

¹⁵¹ ICRC, Customary IHL: Rule 95, Forced labour.

¹⁵² ICRC, Customary IHL: Rule 52, Pillage; Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II) of 08 June 1977.

¹⁵³ UN OHCHR, Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework, Principle 3(a), 1 January 2012, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/reference-publications/guiding-principles-business-and-human-rights>.

¹⁵⁴ This responsibility was expressly recognized by the UN Human Rights Council on 16 June 2011, when it endorsed the UN Guiding Principles and on 25 May 2011 when the 42 governments that had then adhered to the Declaration on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises of the OECD unanimously endorsed a revised version of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. See Human Rights Council, Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises, Resolution 17/4, UN Doc A/HRC/RES/17/4, 6 July 2011, https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/RES/17/4.

The corporate responsibility to respect human rights extends beyond those involved in the extraction of minerals, to all those along the supply chain. For example, in the context described in this report, relevant companies include importers and refiners in Rwanda; trading and transport companies involved in the movement of minerals into Rwanda and then onto third countries where smelting takes place; auditors and consultancies that provide due diligence services; companies that process the minerals; as well as the end users, such as technology companies, that use coltan in mobile phone processors.

International standards require that all of these companies carry out human rights due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for adverse human rights impacts that may be linked to their operations and business relationships, and to remediate any human rights abuses they cause or contribute to.¹⁵⁵

Due diligence is an ongoing, proactive process through which companies “know and show” what they are doing about the potential or actual adverse effects of their business activities, including impacts connected to their supply chains. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict Affected and High-Risk Areas (OECD Guidance), which draws from the UN Guiding Principles, lays out a five-step process for all companies involved in the supply chain of minerals originating from places like eastern DRC and Rwanda to follow.¹⁵⁶

The relevance of the OECD Guidance to minerals sourced from Eastern DRC was recognized in 2010, when the 11 member states of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, a regional body to which both the DRC and Rwanda belong, endorsed it under the Lusaka Declaration.¹⁵⁷

The OECD Guidance also sets out a mitigation strategy for downstream companies to follow if they identify that there is a risk that there have been human rights abuses at the mines where the minerals they source originate.¹⁵⁸ Depending on the circumstances, these companies may either continue to trade with their suppliers while pursuing risk mitigation, temporarily suspend trade pending ongoing risk mitigation, or disengage with a supplier where attempts at mitigation have failed or risk mitigation is considered unfeasible or unacceptable. As long as the business relationship remains in place, a company should take steps to demonstrate how it is using its leverage to mitigate the impact in question, while also consulting with suppliers and affected stakeholders.

The failure of companies along the supply chain to conduct such human rights due diligence would not just mean that they are failing to meet their responsibility to respect human rights but also expose them to legal risk. While the UN Guiding Principles and OECD Guidance are non-binding standards, there has been a move by some governments to turn them into hard law.

In particular, in 2021, an EU law – the Conflict Minerals Regulation – came into force that requires EU companies that import gold, tin, tungsten and tantalum into the EU, above defined volume thresholds to ensure that these minerals and metals come from responsible and conflict-free sources. EU importers are required to identify the smelters and refiners in their supply chains and verify they have proper due diligence practices in place. Each EU member state is responsible for verifying that EU importers comply with the regulation.¹⁵⁹

The EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, although significantly amended in 2026, will apply to in-scope companies from July 2029 and requires them to maintain an ongoing, risk-based human rights and environmental due diligence process covering their operations, subsidiaries and relevant chain of activities, including upstream activities such as the sourcing and extraction of raw minerals.

¹⁵⁵ UN Guiding Principles, Principle 15(c) and 17.

¹⁵⁶ OECD, “OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas”, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-due-diligence-guidance-for-responsible-supply-chains-of-minerals-from-conflict-affected-and-high-risk-areas_9789264252479-en.html, (accessed on 20 July 2026), “Third Edition”;

International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, “Lusaka Declaration of the ICGLR special summit to fight illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Great Lakes Region”, https://ungreatlakes.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/icglr_lusaka_declaration_of_the_icglr_special_summit_to_fight_illegal_exploitation_of_natural_resources_in_the_gl_r.pdf, 15 December 2010.”

¹⁵⁸ OECD Guidance, p. 18.

¹⁵⁹ Regulation (European Union) 2017/821 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 17 May 2017.

¹⁶⁰ The EU Forced Labour Regulation entered into force in 2024 and is a complimentary instrument which, from December 2027, will prohibit the sale, import, and export of products made with forced labour on the EU market.¹⁶¹ This covers products where forced labour has been used in whole or in part at any stage of extraction, harvest, production or manufacture, including in the working or processing related to a product. The Regulation applies to all products regardless of sector or origin, and to all importers or exporters regardless of size.

In the United States, the US government passed in 2010 Section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. The legislation originally required companies listed on US stock exchanges to publicly disclose their use of conflict minerals that originated in DRC or neighbouring countries. It also required in certain instances that companies “undertake due diligence on the source and chain of custody of its conflict mineral.”¹⁶²

In 2015, Global Witness and Amnesty International found that almost 80 % of companies that filed these reports failed to do the minimum required by the law.¹⁶³ In 2017, after President Trump threatened to suspend Section 1502 of Dodd-Frank, the US Securities and Exchange Commission suspended some enforcement of the legislation, particularly the requirement that companies conduct a due diligence review or audit, but companies are still required to file required forms with the SEC and do origin inquiries.¹⁶⁴

Considering the nature of the abuses taking place at the Lomera and Rubaya mines, international companies that buy coltan or gold from Rwanda could also be complicit in international crimes if they meet certain legal standards and evidentiary requirements that establish that corporate executives or other corporate actors contributed to crimes under international law. While statutes establishing international justice mechanisms have never recognized criminal responsibility of legal persons - such as corporations - for crimes under international law, they have held corporate actors - executives and employees - criminally responsible for their roles contributing to those crimes.¹⁶⁵

It is beyond the scope of this briefing to explore a detailed analysis of corporate complicity, which includes such forms as planning, instigation, order, and aiding and abetting. It is worth noting, however, that in the eastern DRC context, corporate actors who knew that their actions assisted in the commission of abuses by M23 that may have amounted to war crimes in Rubaya and Lomera could be held criminally responsible for complicity in war crimes.¹⁶⁶

In December 2024, a group of international lawyers representing DRC, filed criminal complaints against subsidiaries of tech-giant Apple in Belgium and France, accusing them of contaminating Apple’s supply chain with “blood minerals” pillaged from DRC and laundered through international supply chains.¹⁶⁷ An Apple spokesperson told the BBC in December 2024: “As conflict in the region escalated earlier this year, we notified our suppliers that their smelters and refiners must suspend sourcing tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold from the DRC and Rwanda. We took this action because we were concerned it was no longer possible for independent auditors or industry certification mechanisms to perform the due diligence

¹⁶⁰ Directive (EU) 2024/1760 on corporate sustainability due diligence and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 and Regulation (EU) 2023/2859 [2024] OJ L, 5.7.2024, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/Dir/2024/1760/oj> and Directive (EU) 2026/470 amending Directives 2006/43/EC, 2013/34/EU, (EU) 2022/2464 and (EU) 2024/1760 as regards certain corporate sustainability reporting requirements and certain corporate sustainability due diligence requirements [2026] OJ L, 26.2.2026, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2026/470/oj/eng>

¹⁶¹ Regulation (EU) 2024/3015 on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 [2024] OJ L 12.12.2024, available at: eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024R3015

¹⁶² US Securities and Exchange Commission, “Conflict Minerals Disclosure”, 2022, available at <https://www.sec.gov/resources-small-businesses/small-business-compliance-guides/conflict-minerals-disclosure>.

¹⁶³ Amnesty International, “Digging for Transparency: How U.S. companies are only scratching the surface of conflict minerals reporting”, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/1499/2015/en/>, April 2015.

¹⁶⁴ Reuters, “U.S. SEC halts some enforcement of conflict minerals rule amid review”, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/us-sec-halts-some-enforcement-of-conflict-minerals-rule-amid-review-idUSKBN1792WX/>, 8 April 2017.

¹⁶⁵ The Malabo Protocol recognizes corporate responsibility but has not come into force yet. See, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AFR0130632016ENGLISH.pdf>.

¹⁶⁶ *Prosecutor v. Alfred Musema*, ICTR-96-13-A, Appeals Chamber Judgment, 16 November 2001, para 156.

¹⁶⁷ Amsterdam and Partners, “Apple hit with criminal complaints in France and Belgium over “Blood Minerals” in Supply Chain”, <https://amsterdamandpartners.com/press-release-apple-hit-with-criminal-complaints-in-france-and-belgium-over-blood-minerals-in-supply-chain>, 17 December 2024.

required to meet our high standards.”¹⁶⁸ Apple sent a similar message to Global Witness in 2026 in response to its questions about Apple’s supply chain.¹⁶⁹

Rwanda claims that it complies with international due diligence guidelines and collaborates with international oversight bodies. The Rwanda Development Board’s (RDB) website notes: “Rwanda adheres to the OECD due diligence guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals, as such minerals from Rwanda are 100% conflict-free and traceable from mines to international markets.”¹⁷⁰ Moreover, the Rwanda Mines, Petroleum and Gas Board said it provides mineral traceability for tin, tantalum and tungsten, which complies with the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act adopted by the US in 2010. It also claims that it complies with due diligence obligations with the support of the International Tin Research Initiative, ITSCI and RCS Global, a mineral supply chain company that supports compliance.¹⁷¹

But Amnesty International’s research found that Rwanda’s claims of due diligence and traceability collapse under scrutiny. The illicit trafficking of coltan and gold from DRC to Rwanda, including by boat across Lake Kivu, and the numerous Rwandans collaborating with M23 in Lomera and Rubaya disprove Rwanda’s claims of adhering to international due diligence and traceability standards.

Research by Global Witness claimed that the international monitoring processes conducted by ITSCI in Rwanda have been compromised, with the Rwanda Mines Petroleum and Gas Board providing ITSCI tags from Rwanda to smugglers who tag coltan from DRC as originating in Rwanda.¹⁷² In a response to the Global Witness report, ITSCI said that, “Strict tag controls are in place at ITSCI-monitored sites. Rwandan state agents do not receive unlimited quantities of ITSCI tags. Tags are distributed every two weeks based on plausibility assessments at the mines of origin. Information received by ITSCI suggests that non-ITSCI tags may be available in unlimited amounts.”¹⁷³

In response to questions from Amnesty International about its practices, ITSCI responded with a letter explaining its practices and findings.¹⁷⁴ It said that as the security situation in eastern DRC deteriorated in 2025 – and after state services had stopped tagging minerals in eastern DRC – ITSCI sent multiple letters to ITSCI participants, including those in Rwanda and smelters, alerting them of high level of risks and requested they explain the due diligence measures they had taken.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, ITSCI said it directly requested Rwandan exporter participants to provide specific explanations on unusual or unexpected weights or grades of minerals they have traded. ITSCI suspended six ITSCI participant exporters in Rwanda in 2025 and 2026 due to failure to provide sufficient evidence of due diligence implementation.¹⁷⁶

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE M23

- Immediately end all human rights abuses at M23-controlled mining sites, including Rubaya, Lomera, and Ngungu, including removing all individuals involved in human rights abuses at the Rubaya and Lomera mining sites. This includes M23 fighters or security guards who summarily kill, arbitrarily detain, torture or ill-treat artisanal miners, demand ransoms from detained miners or

¹⁶⁸ BBC, “Apple accused of using conflict minerals”, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn8g540wz3jo>, 17 December 2024.

¹⁶⁹ Global Witness, “Same Old Story: Background study on natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo”, https://gw.hacdri.io/media/documents/Same_Old_Story_Global_Witness_DRC_Report_release_date_6_July_2004.pdf, 6 July 2024.

¹⁷⁰ Rwanda Development Board, Mining, <https://rdb.rw/investment-opportunities/mining/>, (accessed on 9 June 2026), “Overview”.

¹⁷¹ Rwanda Mines, Petroleum and Gas Board, Mineral Traceability Services, <https://www.rmb.gov.rw/1/mineral-traceability>, (accessed on 20 July 2026).

¹⁷² Global Witness, “Who buys Rwanda’s smuggled coltan? The global journey of conflict coltan from DRC to the world’s electronics”, https://gw.hacdri.io/media/documents/Global_Witness_Conflict_coltan_Rwanda_final.pdf, June 2026.

¹⁷³ ITSCI, “ITSCI response to Global Witness report on Rwanda’s coltan”, <https://www.itsci.org/2026/06/12/itsci-response-to-global-witness-report-on-rwandas-coltan/>, 12 June 2026.

¹⁷⁴ ITSCI letter dated 14 August 2026 on file with Amnesty International.

¹⁷⁵ ITSCI letter dated 14 August 2026 on file with Amnesty International.

¹⁷⁶ ITSCI letter dated 14 August 2026 on file with Amnesty International.

their family members, force miners to labour for M23, forcibly recruit them for training and send them to M23 training sites in Rumangabo or Tchanzou in Rutshuru, or who torture or ill-treat miners.

- End the pillage of gold and coltan from M23-controlled mines and cease trafficking the minerals to Rwanda. Remove M23 leaders, combatants, or members of the mining security teams who are involved in the pillage and trafficking.
- Stop the destruction of structures and personal property at the Lomera site and allow homeowners and businessowners to freely access their land without repercussions by M23 fighters.
- Release all arbitrarily detained civilians, including all civilian detainees at the Lomera and Rubaya sites.
- Facilitate access of international mining oversight bodies to the Lomera and Rubaya sites to verify that international mining safety procedures are in place and respected to protect the lives of artisanal miners.

TO THE GOVERNMENT OF RWANDA

- As a party to the conflict, ensure that all RDF and all those who the government of Rwanda and the RDF are directing or controlling in the DRC comply with international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions.
- Immediately withdraw any armed Rwandans who are involved in human rights violations, and crimes under international law, at the Rubaya and Lomera sites and ensure that all Rwandans involved in these violations and crimes are held accountable.
- Ensure that all government and military officials who knew or should have known of human rights violations and crimes under international law committed by armed Rwandans at these mines, and who failed to prevent or punish these violations, are held accountable.
- Publicly disclose Rwanda's current engagement with the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative and what steps are being taken to stop trafficking and laundering of minerals and what steps have been taken to intercept trafficked minerals entering the country and return them to the country of origin.
- Disclose to investors and international partners the destination of gold and coltan from DRC that is trafficked to Rwanda, where it is processed, and what steps have been taken to ensure that it no longer enters Rwanda's supply chain.
- Enact relevant corporate accountability legislation, including mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence laws and conflict minerals specific legislation. These must include liability clauses that ensure corporate accountability, guarantees of non-repetition, and remedy for those affected.

TO MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

- Companies should cease purchasing coltan sourced from Rwanda or directly from smelters and processors that buy coltan from Rwanda and seek other sources until Rwanda provides concrete evidence that it has ended the receipt of trafficked coltan from DRC.

- In line with international standards such as the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas, companies that purchase minerals from Rwanda must conduct ongoing, risk-based human rights and environmental due diligence across their value chain to identify and prevent any human rights impacts. Where a company has caused or contributed to abuses, the company must provide adequate remediation to those affected and adjust its policies and practices accordingly to ensure this does not reoccur elsewhere across its business relationships.

TO THE GOVERNMENT OF DRC

- Conduct credible and independent investigations into the human rights abuses committed in M23-controlled mines, including pillage of minerals, and prosecute those suspected of these abuses in fair trials without resorting to the death penalty.
- To the extent possible, ensure that all artisanal miners, mineshaft owners, and others whose property was stolen or destroyed at the Lomera and Rubaya mining sites are compensated.
- Ensure that all artisanal mines in government-controlled areas adhere to the national mining code, international labour and human rights standards, and provide miners with an avenue to voice concerns to DRC government officials about labour conditions at mines.

TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

- The US and US businesses should not purchase coltan and gold from Rwanda – or processors and refineries from third countries that buy coltan and gold from suppliers in Rwanda – until the Rwandan government provides concrete evidence that it has ended the receipt of trafficked coltan and gold from DRC and has taken all necessary steps to ensure that armed Rwandans or others from the country do not take part in abuses at the mining sites, that anyone acting under the direction and control of Rwanda end all involvement in violations of international law at these mining sites, and that it is holding accountable all Rwandans, and those under its direct control, who are complicit in, or participating in, the crimes under international law and human rights violations at the mines.
- Urgently press M23 and Rwanda to stop all human rights abuses in Rubaya and Lomera mines and allow international mining oversight organizations and human rights monitors unfettered access to mining sites it controls.
- No mining deals should take place involving the Rubaya mine or other M23-controlled mines in DRC unless international human rights observers and mining regulatory bodies have full and unfettered access to the mines.
- Investigate the role Rwanda's government plays in the extraction and trafficking of minerals from the Rubaya and Lomera mines, through intelligence sharing with international and regional actors. Any Rwandans involved in mineral extraction at the Rubaya or Lomera mines who collaborate with M23, an armed group that has been subject to legal actions by the US Treasury Department, should be investigated to determine if they are violating international humanitarian laws or committing crimes under international law.

TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS MEMBER STATES

- Uphold in policy and practice the commitments set forth in the [EU's Great Lakes Strategy](#) to “actively encourag[e] the passage from trafficking to a legitimate commerce-based economy” and to pay “special attention... to labour rights, particularly working conditions for mine workers.”
- Marshal unified political will to take concrete steps toward protection of civilians in eastern DRC in line with the EU's Great Lakes Strategy, which commits to place human rights and international humanitarian law at the centre of all EU actions.
- In line with the [Council Conclusions on Global Gateway](#) of 15 June 2026, make full use of forthcoming EU and member state investments in the region through the Global Gateway to influence DRC and Rwanda authorities to respect human rights and the UN Principles on Business and Human Rights, in particular to protect civilians in eastern DRC and end illicit flows of minerals from the region into Rwanda.
- Make full use of the [Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive](#) (CSDDD) along with the [Conflict Minerals Regulation](#), [Forced Labour Regulation](#) and all other relevant EU and member state legislation to ensure a comprehensive, robust and coherent response to the human rights risks linked to their imports of critical raw minerals from Rwanda whose supply chain has been contaminated with minerals trafficked from eastern DRC that are tainted by human rights abuses.
 - In line with their stated commitments, ensure EU-based companies working on the processing, trade and export of critical raw minerals in Rwanda undertake ongoing, risk-based human rights and environmental due diligence assessments to determine if any EU-based business operations or supply chains linked to coltan or gold from Rwanda are at risk of sourcing conflict minerals from eastern DRC.
 - Ensure effective implementation of the CSDDD to require companies to address human rights risks linked to sourcing of coltan and gold from Rwanda across their operations and supply chains. The EU and its member states should also ensure compliance with the Conflict Minerals Regulation for EU importers of tantalum (including coltan, a key source of tantalum) and gold. In parallel, they should ensure all evidence of forced labour is comprehensively investigated to prevent any products linked to forced labour from being placed on and/or exported from the EU market.

TO ALL STATES

- In light of Rwanda's violations of transparency, traceability, and due diligence in its mining sector, as well as its unwillingness to cease collaborating with M23 on importing minerals from DRC into Rwanda, immediately suspend any support towards Rwanda's critical mineral value chain until the country ceases to receive pillaged and trafficked minerals that are tainted by human rights abuses from DRC.
- Urgently engage the Rwandan authorities up to the highest level, strongly urging them to:
 - Ensure all persons involved in the pillage and trafficking of minerals in the Rubaya and Lomera mines are removed and held accountable.
 - End the illicit receipt of coltan and gold in Rwanda.
 - Ensure that armed Rwandans or others from the country do not take part in abuses at the Rubaya and Lomera mining sites.

All third states should make clear that they are ready to use all tools at their disposal to hold Rwandan government officials accountable for human rights violations committed in this context and to put this commitment into action.

- All states and companies domiciled in their territory, must cease the purchase of coltan and gold from Rwanda – or processors and refineries from third countries that buy coltan and gold from suppliers in Rwanda – until the Rwandan government:

- Provides concrete evidence that it has ended the receipt of trafficked coltan and gold from DRC and has taken all necessary steps to ensure that armed Rwandans or others from the country do not take part in abuses at the mining sites.
 - Proactively tasks independent traceability mechanisms to monitor all critical raw minerals operations in Rwanda to this end, particularly those refining gold and coltan sourced from eastern DRC.
 - Acts to hold accountable all Rwandans who are complicit in, or participating in, the crimes under international law and human rights violations at the mines.
- Provide avenues for companies to be held to account in their jurisdiction for their involvement in the trade of minerals from the DRC that have been trafficked to Rwanda and have been linked to human rights abuses.
 - Pursue all efforts toward justice and accountability in eastern DRC by supporting the work of the International Criminal Court and the Commission of Inquiry on DRC established by the UN Human Rights Council and exploring the use of universal jurisdiction to pursue accountability for serious violations of IHL and international human rights law in eastern DRC.
 - Provide increased and sustained support to human rights defenders and civil society groups documenting and advocating for the rights of communities in and around mining areas in eastern DRC.

TO THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

- Mindful of the Office of the Prosecutor's independent mandate, extend the focus of the investigation in DRC to include the situation in South Kivu province, with a view to investigating the role of Rwandan officials and military, as well as M23 forces involved in war crimes, including summary killings, pillage, rape, torture, and enforced disappearances on the territory of the DRC.

TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

- Continue calling on all parties to the conflict in eastern DRC, including Rwanda and M23, to immediately stop all human rights violations and abuses and to fully comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.
- The Working Group on Extractive Industries, Environment and Human Rights Violations should urgently open an investigation into reports of human rights violations and abuses in the mining sector in the DRC, including in M23-controlled mining sites. The investigation should cover reports of Rwanda's involvement in perpetrating, ordering or condoning human rights abuses or violations in Lomera or Rubaya.
- Consider the situation of human rights in the mining sector in the DRC during its next review of the state party report of the DRC submitted to it under Article 62 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- In accordance with its 30 October 2025 Resolution 643 on Justice for Victims of Serious and Massive Human Rights Violations and International Crimes in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1997, urgently convene the hearing on justice and accountability for victims of human rights violations and crimes under international law in the DRC.

TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

- The Human Rights Council (HRC) and states engaging with it should take urgent measures to support the provision of prompt and adequate resources for all HRC mandates, including the DRC Commission of Inquiry, to enable it to fulfil its much-needed work.

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