

Curtain comes down on deadly war in Eastern Congo

Written by GIN

Friday, 08 November 2013 10:39



Nov. 5 (GIN) – Thousands of women dressed in white marched down the central boulevard in Kinshasa this week, singing the praises of President Joseph Kabila and the army, according to media on the scene.

The celebrations marked the end of a brutal 20-month revolt in Africa's mineral-rich eastern Congo. The M23 rebel army reportedly scattered after the Congolese army captured its last hilltop stronghold.

With the defeat of the M23, hopes have been raised for peace in a region where millions died.

The leader of the M23 movement, Bertrand Bisimwa, ordered rebel commanders to prepare fighters for "disarmament, demobilization and social reintegration." The group will pursue its goals through political means, he said.

M23 seized parts of Congo's North Kivu province last year. But the Congolese military, backed by United Nations forces, retook territory from M23 in recent weeks and a two-week U.N.-backed offensive cornered the insurgents in the lush hills along the border with Uganda and Rwanda.

The real test will be whether government and rebels can reach a lasting political deal. M23 took up arms last year when a previous 2009 peace accord with the Tutsi-led rebels unraveled.

Lambert Mende, a spokesman for Kabila's government, said it would sign an accord in the coming days in the Ugandan capital of Kampala, where peace talks have been taking place for months.

Russell Feingold, U.S. special envoy to the Great Lakes region, said: "In a region that has suffered so much, this is obviously a significant positive step in the right direction."

Malawi President Joyce Banda, in her role as Chair of the Southern Africa Development Community, called on the parties to avoid a renewal of fighting, for the sake of the DRC, and the continent as a whole.

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In the U.S., Friends of the Congo executive director Maurice Carney cautioned: "Contrary to media reports, the M23 announcement that they are laying down their arms does not end the conflict in Congo. The story is really whether this is the end of Rwanda's intervention."

"The long overdue pressure on Rwanda by the U.S. and UK was critical" to disabling the DRC, he said... We must keep the pressure on the U.S. government to cease its support of strongmen in the heart of Africa. ... The Congo has seen the deadliest conflict in the world since World War II, with an estimated 6 million killed."