

The AFC/M23 rebel coalition said it has placed the eastern Congolese city of Uvira under the responsibility of the United Nations, calling on international forces to protect civilians it says are threatened by Congolese government troops and their allies.

In a statement released Wednesday, AFC/M23 said the move follows its decision to withdraw from Uvira in mid-December and its commitment to a ceasefire. The group said it formally informed the United Nations that it is handing over the city to the international community to ensure the safety of civilians.

“Our coalition, AFC/M23, today publicly commits to handing over responsibility for the entire city of Uvira to the international community,” the statement said.

The group said it completed the withdrawal of its remaining fighters from the city on Jan. 15, 2026. Those forces had remained temporarily to monitor the security situation while awaiting the deployment of neutral international troops, it said.

AFC/M23 said it is now the responsibility of the United Nations to ensure security and protect civilians in Uvira without discrimination.

The rebel coalition accused Congo’s army, known as FARDC, as well as Burundian troops, local Wazalendo militias and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), of threatening civilians and undermining peace efforts.

“Their presence in Uvira not only endangers civilians but also represents a major obstacle to the implementation of peace agreements,” the group said.

Congo’s government has repeatedly accused AFC/M23 of violating ceasefire commitments and has denied that the rebels fully withdrew from Uvira after announcing their departure in December.

AFC/M23 said it first announced plans to pull its fighters out of Uvira on Dec. 16, 2025, and said the withdrawal was completed two days later. Congolese authorities disputed that claim.

In a letter dated Jan. 15 and addressed to U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres, AFC/M23 said it had been requesting for several days that U.N. peacekeepers deployed in Congo under the MONUSCO mission be sent to Uvira to protect civilians. The letter was also delivered to Vivian Van de Perre, the U.N. secretary-general’s special representative in Congo and acting head of MONUSCO.

AFC/M23 leader Corneille Nangaa Yobeluo said the decision reflects what he described as the group's commitment to peace.

"As of today, AFC/M23 has decided to place the city of Uvira entirely under the responsibility of the international community," Nangaa said.

The rebel coalition warned that continued operations by Burundian forces, the FDLR, Wazalendo militias and mercenaries threaten not only civilians but also regional stability.

AFC/M23 captured Uvira on Dec. 9, 2025, after a week of fighting in the Ruzizi Plain in South Kivu province. The group said it later withdrew at the request of the United States to allow peace talks to continue.

U.S. officials asked the rebels to return to positions about 75 kilometers (47 miles) from Uvira, saying the move would make it easier for the international community to protect civilians.

Earlier this month, the U.N. Security Council voted to extend MONUSCO's mandate for another year and assigned the mission new responsibilities, including monitoring compliance with the ceasefire in South Kivu raising the possibility that U.N. forces could be deployed to Uvira.