

At least 40 Congolese refugees are reported to have died from cholera and malnutrition at the Gatumba transit camp in Burundi in the past ten days.

Kifara Kapenda, the deputy mayor of Uvira, who sought refuge in Bujumbura when the city fell to AFC/M23 rebels told reporters that “Eight people died on December 18 alone, 5 more the day before, and more than 40 in total over 10 days, due to cholera and hunger.”

A refugee on the ground described extreme conditions saying that lack of drinking water, food, medicine and survival kits, with many children and women among them is the biggest challenge they are facing. Refugees live in brigades or transit camps, exacerbating their vulnerability.

Kapenda has called on Congolese authorities and humanitarian organizations to assist the 30,000 Congolese sheltered in Gatumba. A crisis committee has been established to coordinate advocacy efforts and channel aid.

M23 rebels captured Uvira town on December 10, just days after DRC and Rwanda sign a peace deal in Washington. This led to exodus of women and children particularly affected fleeing the area to neighboring Burundi.

Last Wednesday, M23 announced that It was withdrawing from the town after international condemnation of its attacks on the city.

Ezechiel Nibigira, the Burundian president of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), reported 25,000 refugees in Gatumba in western Burundi, and nearly 40,000 in Buganda in the northwest, most of them “completely destitute”.

Some of these refugees who were exhausted and several traumatized with psychological marks reported not have eaten for days.

In Burundi, the United Nations (UN), said that displaced families face difficult conditions at transit points and makeshift camps with minimal infrastructure.

Many have sheltered under trees without adequate protection from the elements, and a lack of clean water and proper sanitation.

Last Wednesday, M23 announced that It was withdrawing from the town after international condemnation of its attacks on the city. The group leadership called

the move, “trust-building measure” to support United States and Qatari-led peace deal.

Some of sources in Uvira reported that the rebel police and intelligence personal remained deployed in the city on Thursday

The M23 rebel group launched its offensive on Uvira less than a week after the presidents of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda met US President Donald Trump in Washington, DC, where they reaffirmed their commitment to a peace agreement.

The capture of the city prompted a sharp response from Washington, with US officials warning of possible consequences and accusing Rwanda of breaching the accord. Kigali has repeatedly denied providing support to the M23 rebels.

According to regional authorities and humanitarian agencies, the fighting has killed more than 400 civilians and forced over 200,000 people to flee their homes since early December.