Amidst the excitement of the Africa Cup of Nations, DR Congo's players have leveraged their platform to highlight the ongoing humanitarian crisis in their country's eastern region.

The mineral-rich area has been plagued by armed groups, including the notorious M23 rebels, for decades, displacing millions and leaving countless civilians dead.

DR Congo striker Cedric Bakambu took to social media, urging the world to pay attention to the plight of his nation, stating, "Everyone sees the massacres in eastern Congo. But everyone is silent." He called for the same energy used to discuss the Afcon to be directed towards addressing the conflict.

The team's captain, Chancel Mbemba, along with over half the squad, expressed solidarity with the victims in a video, pledging to "play for them". This was followed by individual messages from players like Gedeon Kalulu, declaring, "I am Goma. I am Congolese. We want peace."

This campaign appears to be part of a larger online initiative driven by Fonarev, a state fund supporting victims of sexual violence in the conflict. It echoes messages shared by popular musicians like Fally Ipupa and GIMS.

The conflict is fueled by the struggle for control of valuable minerals like gold, diamonds, and cobalt, a crucial component in lithium-ion batteries. A recent TikTok campaign linked the use of vapes to human rights abuses in DR Congo, as cobalt is a key component in their production.

DR Congo, despite boasting two continental titles and a World Cup appearance, has struggled in recent years due to political instability and economic decline. The team's success in the Afcon has offered a glimmer of hope, with Yoane Wissa, their top scorer, expressing their desire to bring joy to a nation burdened by hardship.

This Afcon campaign has transcended the realm of sport, becoming a powerful platform for DR Congo's footballers to demand peace and raise awareness about the suffering of their people. Their voices deserve to be heard, and their message for peace must resonate with the international community.

DR Congo take on hosts Ivory Coast on Wednesday. Ivory Coast, who were the African champions in 1992 and 2015, hardly made knockouts in the ongoing AFCON.

In the last 16, DR Congo, who last won the AFCON in 1974, knocked record holders

Egypt out of the tournament. Egypt returned home after they lost 8-7 on penalties. DR Congo then beat Guinea 3-1 to qualify for the semifinals.

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Ivory Coast beat reigning champions Senegal 5-4 on penalties in the Round of 16. In the quarterfinals, Ivory Coast won against Mali 2-1 after extra time with a very late goal scored by Oumar Diakite.

The winners of the semifinal ties will reach Sunday’s final at Abidjan’s Alassane Ouattara Stadium. The losing teams will play a third-place playoff on Saturday.