

The M23 rebels have retaken the village of Kishishe in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where they are accused of massacring over 170 people at the end of November 2022, according to the UN.

In many reports, Rwanda is accused of supporting these rebels, who retreated from the village in April along with other localities they had taken a year earlier.

But after six months of relative calm, violent fighting resumed in early October between the rebels and the army allied with so-called “patriot” armed groups. As a result, the M23 appears to be gradually retaking the positions it had vacated.

Kishishe was largely deserted by its inhabitants, but fighting nevertheless took place there for two days before the army moved in, according to sources in Goma, the provincial capital.

“The invaders launched large-scale attacks,” said an officer speaking on condition of anonymity, claiming that the rebels had received reinforcements from the Rwandan army. “It is the Rwandans who are attacking us,” he added.

“Kishishe has been controlled by the M23” since late Monday afternoon, said a local civil society representative, and this was confirmed by two security sources.

“The M23 is in Kishishe... The population has fled to (the neighbouring localities of) Kirima, Mutanda, Kanyabayonga and Kibirizi”, said a village official. “There is great tension in Kibirizi, where displaced people are arriving in droves”, said one resident. According to him, FDLR militiamen “in civilian clothes” are also arriving in the town.

The hills around Kishishe are historic strongholds of the FDLR (Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda), an armed group created by former Hutu leaders who committed the genocide against the Tutsi.