

Former Democratic Republic of Congo President Joseph Kabila has been sentenced to death in absentia by a military court in Kinshasa, convicted of treason, war crimes, and other serious offenses. His current whereabouts remain unknown.

The military tribunal on Tuesday found Kabila guilty of crimes including treason, crimes against humanity, murder, sexual assault, torture, insurrection, and supporting terrorism. Lieutenant-General Joseph Mutombo Katalayi, who presided over the trial, said the verdict was based on evidence linking Kabila to the M23 rebel group, which seized key eastern cities, including Goma, in January.

DR Congo's government alleges Kabila collaborated with Rwanda and the rebels during the offensive. Kabila has denied the charges, describing the prosecution as "arbitrary" and accusing the courts of serving as an "instrument of oppression."

Kabila, 54, ruled DR Congo for nearly 18 years after succeeding his father, Laurent Kabila, who was assassinated in 2001. He stepped down in 2019, handing power to President Félix Tshisekedi, with whom he later clashed. He went into self-imposed exile in 2023, mainly in South Africa, but briefly appeared in Goma, then controlled by the M23, in May.

Earlier this year, the Senate voted to strip Kabila of his legal immunity, paving the way for prosecution. The M23 insurgency, which has caused widespread destruction in DR Congo's mineral-rich east, briefly paused under a July ceasefire, but violence continues.

The United Nations and several Western countries have accused Rwanda of backing the M23, allegations Kigali denies, saying its actions aim to prevent the conflict from spilling over into its territory.

The ruling is unprecedented in DR Congo, marking the first time a former president has been sentenced to death by a military court. Observers warn the decision could heighten tensions in the east and complicate efforts to stabilize the region.