

The M23 rebel group has once again occupied Kitshanga, a key strategic town in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo from government troops, in its latest seizure of territory in North Kivu province.

Reports indicated that two civilians were killed and 5 others injured by stray bullets. These new clashes have, once again, caused the displacement of the hundreds of civilians fleeing from their homes.

The M23 rebels took the town on Saturday around 4:30 PM local time after almost a day of clashes with local armed groups

Kitshanga is a strategic town which sits on the last open route between North Kivu's main economic hubs of Goma and Butembo. The others were cut off due to the fighting.

The city of Kitshanga was first occupied again by M23 rebels in October last year after intense fighting which took place, in the middle of the city, between them and local armed groups.

By Sunday morning, the city of Kitshanga was under total occupation by the M23, said a resident who told a UN radio station in Goma town.

Several sources speak of a precarious lull. The rebels are visible in and at the ends of the city where they monitor the situation which, however, remains unpredictable.

Reports also indicate that they (rebels) placed their most advanced positions at Ndondo, 3 km north of Kitshanga, at Kinyumba, 5 km to the west, and at Burungu, 12 km to the south.

Civil society in Masisi territory says it fears reprisals from rebels against civilians. Its coordinator, Telesphore Mitondeke has called on the contingent of the EAC force to intervene.

“ Already during the night, some houses were set on fire in certain neighborhoods by these terrorists, under the pretext of belonging to collaborators of the Wazalendo [local armed groups]. We fear because now populations remain exposed to reprisals. Which requires particular attention to the situation in this strategic city. Populations remain exposed to serious risks. All this unfortunately happens under the helpless and complicit eye of the EAC contingents who only observe, instead of acting in favor of the Congolese people,” Mitondeke noted.

“Some residents who had fled to the Catholic parish, the CBCA hospital, the MONUSCO and EAC bases began to return to their homes this Sunday morning. However, the majority who had taken the direction of Mweso remain concentrated in this town where living conditions leave something to be desired,” he added.