

Rwanda has forcefully dismissed a Human Rights Watch report accusing its troops and M23 rebels of grave abuses in eastern Congo, calling the findings biased, lacking credible evidence, and overlooking the involvement of DR Congo forces and their allies in the conflict.

The 78-page report, titled *Death Was Everywhere* and released June 10, alleges that members of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) and fighters from the M23 rebel group were responsible for arbitrary detention, killings, torture and the forced recruitment of civilians, including children, in areas affected by the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Human Rights Watch said its findings were based on interviews with former detainees, witnesses and other sources. It alleged that abuses were committed in territories under the control or influence of M23 and its allies.

In a statement responding to the report, the Rwandan government dismissed the allegations as unfounded. It denied that RDF personnel had engaged in forced recruitment, unlawful detention, killings, torture or forced labour.

Rwanda also objected to what it described as HRW's attempt to portray M23 and the RDF as operating as a single force. Kigali maintains that M23 is a Congolese armed movement fighting within the Democratic Republic of Congo and that actions attributed to the group should not automatically be assigned to the Rwandan military.

The government argued that the report itself acknowledges cooperation between the Congolese army, known as FARDC, and armed groups opposed to M23, including the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and Wazalendo militias.

According to Rwanda, the report also notes allegations that Congolese authorities provided support, weapons and operational coordination to some of those groups. Kigali criticised HRW for what it described as a failure to conduct a similarly extensive investigation into the activities of FARDC, FDLR and Wazalendo, while focusing heavily on Rwanda and M23.

"The report places disproportionate emphasis on Rwanda and M23 while giving limited attention to the role of Congolese forces and their allies," the government said.

Rwanda further challenged the methodology used in the investigation, arguing that no HRW investigators visited the sites where the alleged abuses occurred. The government said no bodies were exhumed from the mass graves referenced in the report and that no forensic evidence was presented to support the allegations.

According to Kigali, the report acknowledges that the full number of victims could only be verified through the identification and excavation of mass graves. Rwanda argues that no such graves were located or examined during the investigation.

The government also questioned the reliability of witness testimony cited in the report, noting that many sources were not publicly identified. It further claimed that some witnesses were interviewed while in the custody of the Congolese military, raising concerns about the independence of their accounts.

“Biased accountability based on a biased investigation is not accountability,” government spokesperson Yolande Makolo said in comments cited by the government.

Rwanda also accused HRW of professional shortcomings, arguing that the report’s title and conclusions present Rwanda as culpable while, in Kigali’s view, the supporting evidence remains inconclusive.

The government further criticised the report for giving limited attention to foreign mercenaries operating in eastern Congo and to the impact of cooperation among FARDC, FDLR and Wazalendo on civilians and regional security.

Rwanda has long identified FDLR as a major security threat. The group was formed by individuals linked to the perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and has operated in eastern Congo for decades. Kigali argues that overlooking the activities of FDLR and its alleged support networks fails to address one of the root causes of insecurity in the region.

The government also faulted the report for not adequately addressing what it described as Congo’s violations of commitments made under Washington-mediated peace efforts and ceasefire arrangements aimed at reducing tensions in eastern Congo.

The report comes amid continued tensions between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo over the conflict in eastern Congo, where M23 has captured

territory in recent years. Congolese authorities, the United Nations and several Western governments have accused Rwanda of supporting M23, allegations Kigali has repeatedly denied.

The conflict has displaced millions of people and contributed to one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. At the same time, regional and international mediators continue efforts to secure a lasting political and security settlement.

In its response, Rwanda said it remains committed to safeguarding its national security and supporting diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. The government described the Washington agreements as an important framework for achieving lasting peace through regional cooperation, security guarantees, justice and political dialogue.

Rwanda said it would continue working with regional and international partners in support of solutions based on dialogue, stability and cooperation.