Rwanda on Monday received 532 nationals repatriated from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where they had been held under the control of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a militia group that had long prevented them from returning home.

The voluntary repatriation was supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Most of those arriving were women and children who crossed into Rwanda through the La Corniche border post, also known as Grande Barrière, in Rubavu District.

“We lived in very difficult conditions, always running from Congolese armed groups,” said one returnee upon arrival. “There were too many militias chasing us, and we had nothing to eat.”

Another woman, who had fled to Congo in 1994 and spent decades in insecurity without legal documents, said she was relieved to finally come home. “We are happy to be welcomed back and we believe we will live in peace,” she told reporters at the border.

Others described constant fear. “We would go to bed thinking life was impossible because of the fighting,” said one mother. “Nobody could sleep during the endless battles.”

Rubavu District Mayor Prosper Mulindwa said returnees were immediately given food and emergency assistance, as many showed signs of illness linked to malnutrition.

They will be transferred to the Nyarushishi transit camp in Rusizi District, where they will undergo health screening, receive treatment, and begin the reintegration process. “At Nyarushishi, they will find medical teams, government services to register them, and support to obtain national identity cards,” Mulindwa said. “They have lived without documents for many years.”

The mayor said each family would receive food allowances and financial support to help restart their lives. Returnees above 18 years old will be given $250, while minors will receive $150. In addition, families will receive Rwf 48,000 in food assistance, with the amount adjusted according to household size.

Mulindwa urged the returnees to encourage others still in DRC to come home. “They

should not listen to lies that there is no peace in Rwanda," he said.

Monday's repatriation follows a high-level meeting held in Addis Ababa in June 2025, which brought together delegations from Rwanda, DR Congo and UNHCR to discuss voluntary repatriations.

In May 2025, Rwanda also received more than 1,100 citizens from eastern Congo, where they too had been held hostage by the FDLR, a group founded by perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.