Residents in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are urged to remain hopeful as international and local efforts continue to stabilize the conflict-ridden region, the United Nations' top envoy for the country said Friday.

Bintou Keita, head of the UN peacekeeping mission MONUSCO, acknowledged the daily hardships faced by civilians who have fled violence, emphasizing the resilience of communities across North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri provinces.

"People are exhausted, and we understand their impatience," Keita told UN News in an exclusive interview. "But they should not lose hope. We are determined to bring peace to the east of the DRC."

Armed groups, including the M23 rebels, control large swaths of territory. The rebels seized the North Kivu capital, Goma, in January, and Bukavu in February. Rwanda, accused of backing M23, denies providing military support.

Diplomatic initiatives are ongoing. The Washington Agreement, signed by the DRC and Rwanda in June, and the Doha Declaration of Principles, signed in July under Qatari mediation, aim to establish a permanent ceasefire. MONUSCO will play a monitoring and support role once a ceasefire is in place.

Keita highlighted UN efforts to protect civilians and provide aid. MONUSCO bases serve as shelters, while phone networks and partnerships with NGOs help those unable to reach these sites. Peacekeepers continue to monitor human rights violations in areas under rebel control.

In Ituri, MONUSCO is conducting joint operations with the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) and coordinating with the Ugandan army to counter attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), responsible for most killings in the province.

The UN envoy also stressed the importance of women's participation in peace processes, noting programs to train Congolese women in local mediation and dialogue.

Despite the ongoing violence, Keita said the UN and its partners remain committed to stabilizing eastern DRC.