At least 319 people were killed in a series of coordinated attacks last month in eastern Congo, the United Nations reported Wednesday, calling the violence among the deadliest recorded since the resurgence of the M23 rebel group in 2022.

According to U.N. human rights chief Volker Türk, the assaults occurred between July 9 and July 21 across four villages in Rutshuru territory, located in North Kivu province. The attacks, alledgedly carried out by M23 fighters, targeted civilians, with multiple firsthand accounts describing executions and forced displacement.

“The scale and brutality of these attacks are appalling,” Türk said in a statement. “They come in the wake of commitments made toward peace and reconciliation. Civilians must not pay the price for political or military ambitions.”

The violence casts a shadow over a Qatar-led peace initiative that aims to broker a permanent agreement between Congolese authorities and the M23 movement by August 18. One of the core pillars of the proposed deal is the protection of civilians and the safe return of the millions displaced by the conflict.

Despite the signing of a Declaration of Principles on July 19 — which included commitments to restore government authority in rebel-held towns and reduce hostilities — the UN noted that some of the most lethal attacks happened after the agreement was signed.

The M23 group has not issued a statement responding to the UN findings.

Earlier this year, M23 forces captured two strategic cities in eastern Congo, marking one of the most significant escalations in the conflict in recent years. The region, rich in minerals, has long been plagued by unrest and the presence of over 100 armed factions vying for control.

As the deadline for the peace accord approaches, the international community is watching closely to see whether the parties will uphold their commitments — and whether civilians will be spared further bloodshed.