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Uganda rebels denounce offensive

Lula Ahrens
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The Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has denounced a Congolese military campaign against it in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Congolese troops are backed by UN peacekeepers in an effort to protect civilians in DR Congo's northern regions.

Troops

A UN military spokesman confirmed Tuesday that the Congolese army is deploying troops in the mineral-rich northern border region to stop the LRA from attacking civilians. He added that the United Nations' largest peacekeeping mission in DR Congo (MONUC) is offering the Congolese army logistical support. "This is a containment operation. It falls under MONUC's mandate to protect the civilian population," Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Paul Dietrich told Reuters.

MONUC already has around 17,000 soldiers and police deployed in the former Belgian colony. DR Congo's army has sent several hundreds of troops to the northern town of Dungu. It reportedly plans to deploy a further 900 to 2000.

Civil war

The LRA has fought the government in northern Uganda for more than 20 years. The war left some two million people displaced.

LRA leader Joseph Kony is wanted for war crimes by the ICC. He is accused of a series of war crimes, including the abduction and mutilation of civilians and forcing thousands of children to take up arms. He has recently been reported to be looting villages from the Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan and Congo. He is also said to have six new bases in northern DR Congo and to be running diamond mines in the Central African Republic. He failed to show up in April for the signing of a peace deal after more than 18 months of talks with the government. He is said not to have signed the agreement because he sought guarantees about arrest warrants from the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.

In June, Uganda, Congo and Sudan agreed to coordinate military efforts to stamp out the LRA rebellion.

Regrettable

LRA spokesperson David Matsanga told the BBC he has written to the UN in protest because the move threatened a renewed peace initiative. "This is very regrettable that the United Nations have decided to deploy troops at a time when we are in peace talks," he said. According to Matsanga, the operation by DR Congo and the UN is one of the factors that prevent Mr Kony from signing a peace deal.

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