Genocide Watch recommends that:

1. The U.S. and E.U. help the U.N. and the D.R.C. government disband ethnic militias to prevent genocide.
2. The U.N., the U.S., and the E.U. increase humanitarian aid for refugees and internally displaced persons.

There are at least 120 armed groups active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.) due to a lack of effective governance. Historically persecuted minorities are still targeted today. In recent years, they have faced worsening violence.

In Ituri, the Hema have been targeted in what the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) said may constitute genocide. Tensions between Lendu and Hema date back to the colonial era, when the Belgians gave the Hema a higher social status. This conflict erupted into war from 1999 to 2003. In 2017, the death of a Lendu priest sparked anti-Hema hate speech, including false accusations that Hema were planning to “exterminate” the Lendu. The Cooperative for Development of the Congo (CODECO), a Lendu militia, attacked the Hema. They raped, beheaded, and mutilated victims and used body parts as trophies. A ceasefire and a delegation of ex-warlords that President Félix Tshisekedi sent in 2020 to negotiate the demobilization of CODECO fighters have had little effect. Instead, Ituri has seen a surge in violence.

Luba of Kasaï origin (Kasaï-Luba) have experienced xenophobia in former Katanga Province since they resettled there under colonial rule. In the 1990s, after Katangan leaders ordered the expulsion of “non-natives,” over 5,000 Luba were killed. In the 2000s, returning Kasaïans faced accusations of economic exploitation. The UNJHRO found that 37% of hate speech in the D.R.C. targeted Luba in 2020. Congolese President Tshisekedi is a Kasaï-Luba. Some Katangans—who supported his predecessor Joseph Kabila and felt humiliated by Tshisekedi’s 2019 election win—have attacked Luba. In Kasaï, Luba face persecution. Luba are seen as “outsiders.” The Luba Kamiuna Nsapu rebellion arose in 2016 following a chiefdom dispute in Kasaï Central Province. The rebellion caused a humanitarian crisis. In 2017, state forces reacted with excessive violence against civilians, particularly Luba. The Bana Mura, a mainly ethnic Chokwe militia, joined state forces in Kasaï Province and targeted Luba and the Lulua sub-group, using tactics aimed at eliminating them. The U.N. said all actors committed crimes against humanity. The Bana Mura subjected Luba to persecution. The crisis subsided by 2018, but a 2020 report said some children remained abducted. Recent clashes between Luba and Kuba could cause a new crisis.

“Banyarwanda” or “Rwandophones” (groups originally from Rwanda) face persecution. The Tutsis’ citizenship is contested because some Tutsis arrived in the Congo after independence in 1960. During the Congo Wars (1996-2003), the Rwandan army invaded the Congo (then named Zaire) to overthrow President Mobutu and to stop attacks by Rwandan Hutu exiles. Some Congolese Rwandophones joined the Rwandan army attacks against Rwandan Hutu militias, including remnants of the Interahamwe. Today, all Rwandophones remain associated with the Rwandan invasion. Allegations of Rwandan government support for Tutsi self-defense groups increase anti-Tutsi sentiment. Non-Tutsi Congolese ethnic militias oppose the return of 50,000 Banyarwanda refugees who have lived in camps in Rwanda since the 1990s. The extremist Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, an offshoot of the genocidal Interahamwe, still targets civilians.

The Batwa forest people, also known as “Pygmies,” face persecution. Exclusionary policies have subjected them to cultural genocide. Although Batwa hunting actually promotes conservation, forest rangers use violence to deny them entry into forests that they rely on for sustenance. This year, the Congolese Parliament finally passed a law against anti-Batwa discrimination.

U.S. special forces have offered to help the D.R.C. fight the country’s deadliest group, the Islamist Allied Democratic Forces. The government’s “state of siege” has failed to end ethnic violence in Ituri and North Kivu.

The D.R.C. is at Stage 5: Organization, Stage 6: Polarization, Stage 8: Persecution, and Stage 9: Extermination.

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