

## Is safety and a small plot of land too much for DR Congo's beleaguered people to hope for? UN aid chief asks

Holding up a picture of a mother who lost two of her children, as well as her husband when their village in restive eastern DRC was attacked and burned down by armed militia in January, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock – who undertook a mission the country last week – explained:

“This is Mwasi Kallunga and her seven children, including her 18-month-old baby. You all have this picture in front of you [...] They fled, walked for two straight days and now live in squalid conditions under a plastic sheet in a tiny so-called shelter in a congested, cramped, unsanitary, hilly camp at constant risk of fire and flood.”

Across the country, over 4.5 million people are displaced and most among them cannot even contemplate returning home due to the scale of violence and insecurity.

Furthermore, over the last year, humanitarian needs have doubled and an estimated 13 million people are in need of assistance, including 4.6 million acutely malnourished children – about half of them suffering severe acute malnutrition.

“There is also an epidemic of sexual violence, most of it unreported and unaddressed, and much of it against children,” added Mr. Lowcock, warning that without the work of humanitarian actors on the ground, “things would be much worse.”

Humanitarian work, however, remains severely challenged, including kidnappings and hijackings of aid workers as well as lack of funding for relief programmes.

### **‘There is despair, but there is also hope’**

In spite of the overwhelming challenges, the selfless solidarity of many Congolese families is remarkable, stated Mr. Lowcock, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

“They have so little, yet they welcome their brothers and sisters from within and outside the country into their homes when those people are displaced by violence.”

The same solidarity is needed from the international community, he urged, stressing that the humanitarian situation in the DRC has to be kept on the agenda and solutions to the root causes of the worsening crisis – including on the political front – must be found.

"I asked [Mwasi] about her hopes for the future. She wants to be resettled, given a small plot of land to farm, and to get her children back into school. It's not so much to ask for, is it?"