

## **GRASP** Monitors Goma Fighting

As rebel armies advance into the city of Goma in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo – prompting mass evacuations of refugees into both Uganda and Rwanda – the Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) is seeking to monitor the status and safety of conservation partners in the region.

The M23 rebels entered Goma November 20 on foot, escalating clashes with the United Nations-backed troops defending the city. Goma is the provincial capital of North Kivu, and is home to more than 1 million people.

More than a dozen GRASP partners work to study, conserve and protect great apes in eastern DR Congo, and each is committed to ensuring the safety of its national and expatriate staffs. Although power cuts may hinder communication, some updates may be found at web links listed below:

Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (DFGFI): Congolese staff members are reported safe in their homes, and expatriate staff were evacuated on security concerns earlier this year. DFGFI has plans ready for the evacuation of Congolese staff, if necessary. All field gorilla protection, research and community programs have continued without interruption. (<a href="http://gorillafund.org/blog">http://gorillafund.org/blog</a>)

African Wildlife Foundation (AWF): The region's violence suspended some gorilla monitoring, and the safety of the AWF staff is being closely monitored. ( <a href="http://awf.org/content/headline/det\_ail/4611">http://awf.org/content/headline/det\_ail/4611</a> )

Gorilla Organization: Congolese staff are reported safe in Goma, where the Resource Centre is based, although evacuation plans are in place. But there are fears that some staff who spoke out against rebels for invading the Virunga National park earlier this year could be targeted. ( <a href="http://www.facebook.com/GorillaOrganization">http://www.facebook.com/GorillaOrganization</a>)

Virunga National Park: Rangers at the Kibati patrol post were evacuated to Goma as fighting swept south, but now find themselves under siege in Goma. Unlike expatriate staff – who can cross into Rwanda fairly easily – the Congolese staff cannot cross the border. ( <a href="http://gorillacd.org/blog/">http://gorillacd.org/blog/</a>

International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP): The security of staff in Goma is being monitored, even as IGCP begin to consider the financial implications of funding losses in the region for gorilla conservation. To date, emergency funds from ICGP partners WWF and Fauna & Flora International have met the gaps. (<a href="http://www.igcp.org/concern-remains-for-the-mountai-n-gorillas-and-people-of-virunga-national-park-drc/">http://www.igcp.org/concern-remains-for-the-mountai-n-gorillas-and-people-of-virunga-national-park-drc/</a>

Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project (MGVP): Some staff relocated from the Rwandan border town of Gisenyi to Ruhengeri in order to escape the violence, but others remain in Goma with their families. (http://www.facebook.com/gorilladoctors?ref=ts&fref=ts)