

SITUATION UPDATE



Aerial view of part of the Goma destroyed on Saturday, May 22, by the Nyiragongo lava flow.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Thousands of people have been displaced in Goma, a city of 2 million inhabitants, after the nearby Nyiragongo Volcano erupted for more than 12 hours on Saturday, May 22. The lava has so far destroyed 17 neighborhoods on its way toward the city center. At least 32 people have been confirmed dead, including seven by lava, two from asphyxia due to volcanic gases, three from smoke and nine from road accidents as they attempted to escape from the lava spill.¹ In addition, four prisoners died when inmates of the Goma Central prison panicked and tried to escape, in fear of being abandoned by penitentiary authorities.²

The city has been without power since Saturday night, due to transformers and the grid that sends electricity to the city having been destroyed by the lava flow. Water is being rationed in the city, with several pipes that convey water to parts of the city destroyed. Displaced persons who crossed over to the neighboring Rwandan city of Gisenyi on Saturday night found upon their return the next day that they could not go back to their homes, because they either had been destroyed by lava or were too close to the neighborhoods buried by still-hot lava. Cases of deaths from asphyxia have been reported from gases that the cooling lava emits when rain falls on it. Deprived of water, residents cannot depend on rain for drinking water, due to acidity caused by volcanic gases and ash lingering in the atmosphere.

Families have reported members unaccounted for, including children and other relatives who panicked and sought refuge in still-to-be identified areas. Cases of pregnant women delivering on the roadside during flight, including premature deliveries, have been reported. Families that host displaced persons have reported group sizes increasing overnight by an average of five to 12 people, which threatens the ability of these host families—already strained by the negative socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19—to ensure that everyone has a sufficient number of meals each day. Other displaced people have been staying in church buildings and other public places, including schools, which are thus unable to operate normally. Groups of families in makeshift tents built from plastic, tree branches and palm fronds also have been seen on the roadside and open fields close to areas destroyed by the lava, as well as areas as far away as Sake, 25 kilometers northwest of Goma.

Despite the lava flow having ceased Sunday morning, earth tremors as strong as 5.1 on the Richter scale have been felt frequently in Goma, and as far away as Bukavu, on the other side of Lake Kivu, as well as in Gisenyi and Kigali, cities in neighboring Rwanda. Experts believe that these tremors might be indications of future eruptions, similar to 2002, when lava emerged in several parts of the city far from Nyiragongo's craters. People have thus been asked to stay alert, and

FAST FACTS

- The Nyiragongo Volcano erupted on Saturday, May 22, leading to the mass evacuation and displacement of more than 8,000 people.
- The volcano has caused earthquakes; continuing aftershocks are stoking fears of a second eruption.
- The airport in Goma is closed until further notice.

RESPONSE

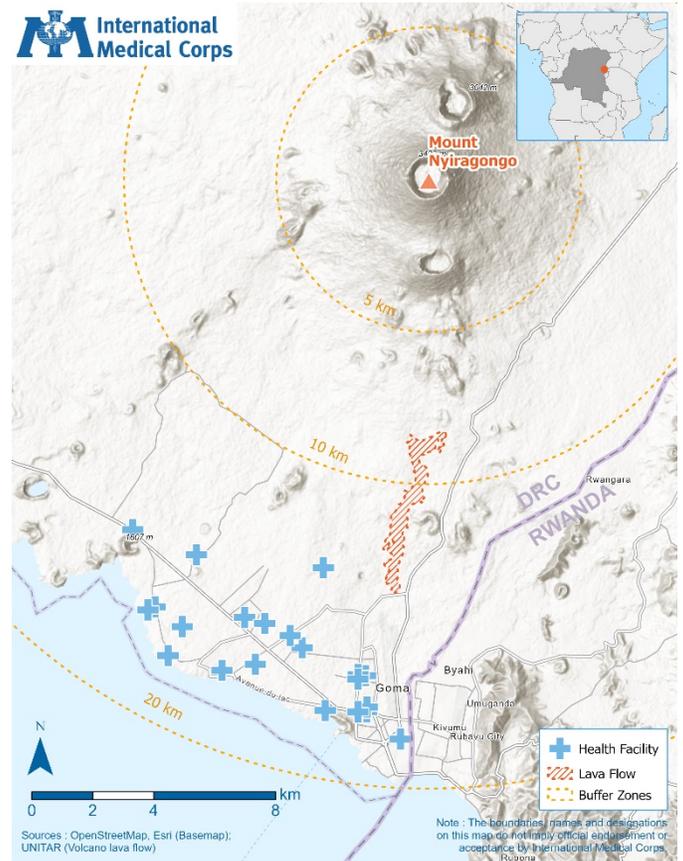
- Working with local and national authorities as well as other partner INGOs, International Medical Corps is assessing gaps in services and consolidating plans for assistance.

¹ [Congo's Goma hit by tremors after volcanic eruption, scores missing | Reuters](#)

² [DR Congo's Goma volcano: 'I couldn't save my sick husband from the lava' - BBC News](#)

high-risk areas in the city—including parts close to the city center—where lava might emerge have been identified, with people asked to evacuate to Sake. Although the governor called for calm and orderly transport, thousands of people have taken to private vehicles or motorbikes, or even on foot, to leave the city. Some, uncertain about the conditions in Sake, have decided to move toward Bukavu. Normally accessible by boat, movement toward that city has been halted due to the risks posed by large numbers of people on the lake.

Residents have been working and sleeping mostly outside, as cracks caused by the tremors have begun to be observed in buildings in Goma as well as in some buildings and roads in the neighboring Rwandan city of Gisenyi. Schools that recently reopened after being closed for several months as part of COVID-19 restrictions have again been suspended, increasing protection risks to children. Health facilities also have been affected by the lava flows, with some destroyed and others evacuated, leading to overcrowding of the few health facilities that remain functional. Health staff are overwhelmed, not only with COVID-19 response activities (including vaccinations) but with the need to treat people transferred from other facilities and those suffering from burns and intoxication from volcanic gases. The price of fuel has doubled, with many filling stations evacuated to avoid explosions. In addition, because the main road that connects the city to towns north of the city that are a source of food has been cut off by lava flow, the price of some food commodities has increased. Access to the city also has been restricted because its only airport has been closed.



International Medical Corps Response

International Medical Corps Rapid Response Team Assessment of Gaps

Interviews that International Medical Corps has conducted with key informants reveal that the main needs of displaced persons are food, shelter, access to health services and non-food items—including household utensils, clothing (including those that protect against rain and cold weather)—and items relating to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The key informants (local government officials as well as officials in the Civil Protection Service) also mentioned plans to identify three sites to which families currently staying in schools, churches and other public places will be moved.

In addition, UNICEF reported the need to ensure that women and other vulnerable persons, especially unaccompanied children, are protected. Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is needed, especially as panic and anxiety is common not only among displaced persons and strained host families, but also amongst other members of the community, due to the repeated tremors. The local Red Cross is helping local government officials trace people unaccounted for, and is working to identify families that host displaced persons. Government and municipal authorities say they are looking forward to support from aid agencies.

Other needs include prepositioned kits of first-aid materials, medicines, personal protective equipment (PPE), other medical supplies and equipment for emergency surgical and other interventions (including management of burns and gas intoxication), given the crush wounds and other forms of physical trauma that could happen if buildings and other infrastructure begin to collapse as a result of frequent earth tremors, and if lava flows resume. Local health authorities also cited a need for training of health staff and community volunteers on how to provide first aid and emergency health and surgical interventions.

For Additional Information

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