

# “The life of a Congolese person is worth as much as any other”

Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Recent Observations from the DRC  
26 May 2026

This briefing by Insecurity Insight analyses public social media activity from 19 January - 09 April 2026 in the DRC.



Understanding how aid actors are portrayed online is increasingly critical. Social media narratives shape community perceptions of humanitarian organisations and can influence operational access and staff safety. As online discourse becomes more central to how aid is understood and contested, monitoring these narratives is an important component for aid acceptance, security management, programming and communication with affected populations.

This briefing is part of a longer-term initiative for the DRC to examine how aid agency acceptance or rejection is expressed on social media. This edition focuses on **security incidents affecting the aid sector which surfaced on public social media platforms in the DRC between January and April 2026**, examining how social media users discussed attacks on aid workers, aid facilities and humanitarian assets, and what narratives, including harmful information and misinformation, emerged in response. This edition covers:

- The 11 March drone strike in Goma and the death of a UNICEF staff member which generated the largest volume of engagement and triggered sustained political contestation and forensic misinformation.
- The 18 February attack on an MSF medical convoy in Rutshuru territory, North Kivu, and the predominantly supportive public response.
- The 31 March attack on a nurse and Red Cross volunteer in Kalembe and the detention of a ZOA humanitarian worker in Goma, which produced a small but analytically significant comment thread.
- The 29-31 March armed robbery at the NGO Héritiers de la Justice in Bukavu.

The selection does not represent the full scope of online discussions on aid in the DRC but highlights the most visible public narratives during this period of direct relevance to aid worker safety, organisational reputation, and humanitarian access. The analysis draws only on public posts, excluding content from private groups, closed networks, or encrypted messaging platforms.

## Key Takeaways

### The 11 March Drone Strike in Goma and the Death of a UNICEF Staff Member

Between 11 March and 9 April 2026, coverage of the drone-delivered explosive strike on a residential complex housing international aid workers in the Himbi neighbourhood of Goma, which killed at least one UN international staff member and two ‘civilians’ whose identity was not made public, **generated 475 posts and 955 comments, reaching an estimated 7.2 million users**. Discussion was primarily concentrated on X. The narrative was shaped by individual users, influencers and edited local media, who together accounted for over 95% of posts, while official UN and humanitarian accounts represented less than 2% of the total.

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Responsibility for the strike was disputed from the outset: the AFC/M23 attributed the attack to the Congolese government, while Kinshasa in turn accused the Rwanda Defence Forces and AFC/M23. France, whose national was killed, called for an independent investigation without attributing responsibility. No official attribution had been established by the close of the monitoring period. A technical investigation into the strike is being conducted by UNMAS, though no findings had been made public by the time of publication. The absence of any official public conclusion meant that unverified claims and competing narratives about the origin of the strike continued to circulate unchallenged in the social media space throughout the monitoring period.

Engagement remained active well beyond the immediate news cycle suggesting a strong emotional interest. The highest-reach post was published by a local edited media platform on Facebook on 29 March, eighteen days after the strike, reaching over 1.1 million users. A verified Congolese journalist, who has consistently been active around aid related topics, appeared in three of the five highest-reach posts, consistently foregrounding accountability and the unresolved identities of the two non-UNICEF victims.

The AFC/M23 official account also **posted** directly on the incident, explicitly attributing responsibility to the Kinshasa government and framing the strike as a deliberate attack on humanitarian workers, a framing reinforced in subsequent public communications by AFC/M23 leadership.

Of the 955 comments, 145 (15.2%) were critical and 805 (84.3%) neutral. Critical comments clustered heavily around a small number of high-reach posts, indicating that hostility was concentrated rather than evenly distributed across the online conversations.

Social media discussion of the incident preceded any public communication from the organisations involved. Unverified claims about the circumstances of the strike circulated widely within hours, shaping public interpretation before institutional responses were issued.

- **Disputed facts and forensic misinformation:** Certain comments disputed the basic facts of the incident, arguing that visible bullet impacts on the building's walls were inconsistent with a drone strike and pointed instead to a staged operation. These claims consistently circulated across several high-engagement threads and were expressed by users on both sides of the FARDC/M23 blame divide, suggesting the misinformation spread independently of political alignment.

**"She was not killed by drones, it is a diversion. The impacts on the walls have nothing to do with a drone attack. We demand an independent investigation."**

*("Elle n'a pas été tuée par des drones, c'est une diversion. Les impacts sur les murs n'ont rien avoir avec l'attaque de drones. Nous exigeons une enquête indépendante pour connaître la vérité sur cet incident.")*

The forensic misinformation narrative is analytically significant because the same visual evidence was used by users on both sides of the conflict to support opposing claims about responsibility. Claims relying on amateur interpretation of visual evidence may prove difficult to counter once circulating and may persist regardless of formal investigation outcomes.

- **Bias, differential value of lives:** Some comments questioned why the death of a French humanitarian generated international attention while Congolese civilian deaths in the same conflict had gone largely unacknowledged. This argument appeared across multiple high-engagement threads and was directed at UNICEF, MONUSCO and international actors including France and the EU. The framing was not a rejection of humanitarian work but an expression of perceived double standards in how the international community responds to different victims.

**"We condemn this death. But where was this same emotion when thousands of Congolese were being massacred in the East? The Congolese people are not fooled by the strategies and collusion between Emmanuel Macron and Paul Kagame. The life of a Congolese person is worth as much as any other."**

*("Nous condamnons cette mort. Mais où était cette même émotion quand des milliers de Congolais sont massacrés à l'Est ? Le peuple congolais n'est pas dupe des stratégies et des complicités entre Emmanuel Macron et Paul Kagame. La vie d'un Congolais vaut autant que toute autre.")*

## What this tells us

- Security incidents of this nature function as a significant flashpoint in broader online discourse about the conflict and international accountability rather than as a contained discussion about the death of an aid worker. The very limited positive sentiment (here meaning expressions of condolence or solidarity with humanitarian workers, not approval of the incident) and minimal institutional participation could explain why the comment environment was defined by political contestation rather than discussions expressing concern over the increasingly dangerous environment for aid workers, contributing to an increasing perception gap between sentiment within the aid sector and wide public understanding of conflict and humanitarian aid.
- High-profile security incidents are typically reported on social media within minutes, while aid agencies generally wait until facts are confirmed before issuing public statements. This gap creates an information vacuum in which unverified claims establish themselves before any institutional response is possible.
- The visible disparity in international attention between the death of a Western staff member and Congolese civilian deaths reinforced pre-existing perceptions of inequitable treatment, amplifying the sense of injustice and feeding directly into the bias narrative.
- Communicators aligned with conflict parties responded instantly, introducing doubt about the basic facts of the incident and shifting attention toward allegations against aid agencies. Once circulating, these narratives proved difficult to counter and persisted throughout the monitoring period.

### **Attack on an MSF Medical Convoy, Rutshuru, 18 February 2026: solidarity dominates, naming of perpetrators contested**

On **18 February 2026**, in Maiyamoto area, Busendo village, Rutshuru territory, North Kivu province, an MSF ambulance transporting medicines to the Kibirizi health area and a Norwegian Refugee Council vehicle travelling from Vitshumbi to Goma were intercepted and looted at around 1100hrs at roadblocks affiliated with M23 and RDF fighters. Coverage generated 7 posts across Facebook and X, reaching an estimated 1.1 million users with 1,214 engagement actions. Reach was heavily concentrated: the MSF official Facebook post alone accounted for 927,820 of the total estimated reach, with the remaining six posts accounting for less than 15%. Discussion was almost entirely contained within the MSF post's comment section, which generated 63 of the total comments. The NRC, whose vehicle was also targeted in the attack, did not publish any public social media post on the incident during the monitoring period.

The dominant public response to MSF was one of solidarity. Positive comments accounted for 66.7% of the total, with users expressing sympathy and support for humanitarian space. Neutral comments (31.7%) were largely brief and contextual. Negative commentary was isolated, accounting for a single comment (1.6%).

- **Bias: institutional attribution of responsibility — isolated:** One comment criticised MSF for not explicitly naming M23 as responsible for the attack, suggesting the organisation appeared afraid to denounce the perpetrators. This is an isolated comment and should not be overstated. However, it reflects a tension between MSF's institutional use of neutral language, referring to "unidentified armed men", and public expectations that humanitarian organisations should assign direct responsibility to armed actors.

**"It's the M23, hmm, one would think you are afraid to denounce them."**

*("Ce sont les M23, hum, on dirait vous avez peur de les dénoncer.")*

## What this tells us

- The predominantly positive public response stands in notable contrast to the political contestation that characterised discussion of the Goma strike. The convoy attack generated sympathy and solidarity rather than contestation. These two incidents together suggest that public responses to security incidents may be shaped not only by institutional communication but also by the political context and assumptions about the responsible conflict party and their engagement on social media. Neither MSF nor any other post in the dataset named the perpetrators publicly, with all sources referring to unidentified armed men. MSF's post accounted for the overwhelming majority of reach on this incident. No communication on the incident from the assumed perpetrators attempting to shape the interpretation of the incidents could be identified. This tension between institutional use of neutral language, the public expectations of direct attribution is likely to recur in future incidents in M23-controlled territory and the capacity of the assumed perpetrators to intervene online are some of the complex factors to consider in appropriate crisis response strategies .

## Attacks on Health Workers in Kalembe and Goma, 26–31 March 2026

On 30 March 2026, in Kalembe town, Mweso health zone, Masisi territory, North Kivu province, M23 soldiers shot the head nurse at the Kalembe health centre and assaulted a local Red Cross coordinator, accusing both of having ties to Wazalendo. They were then taken away on a motorcycle to an undisclosed location. Five posts across X and Facebook covered these incidents, reaching a combined estimated three million users, the second highest reach figure across all five incidents in this dataset. The highest-reach posts were by a local edited media platform on Facebook (1,123,610) and X (995,158), followed by a verified journalist (816,914). None of these posts generated substantial engagement.

- **Delegitimisation of the protected status of healthcare workers under IHL in the aftermath of the event:** One comment directly challenged the protected status of the victims, suggesting that the nurse was a Wazalendo combatant rather than a civilian health worker. Though present in only one identified comment, this framing directly mirrors the justification used by the AFC/M23 at the time of the arrests and carries significant operational implications.

*"A nurse or a wazalendo in hiding? Before the war they are wazalendo and after they are civilians...?"*

*("Un infirmier ou un WAZALENDO qui se cache? Avant la guerre ils sont les wazalendo et après ils sont les civiles...?")*

The remaining comments included flat denials of the incident, accusations of fake news directed at the reporting journalist, and a comment disputing the factual basis of the post. These were coded as neutral in sentiment but represent a pattern of credibility-targeting directed at the reporter.

## What this tells us

- The victim delegitimisation narrative, even in a single comment, is analytically significant because it echoes the stated justification of the armed actors and, if it gains traction, increases the risk of further targeting of health workers in M23-controlled areas.
- The very high reach of this incident, driven by edited media and verified journalists rather than the organisations involved, means the story had substantial public visibility with minimal institutional communication.
- The attempts to deny the incident or to suggest that the health worker was a wazalendo associated suggests online engagement of parties that may have ties with the accused party.

## Armed Robbery at Héritiers de la Justice, Bukavu, 29–31 March 2026: limited online visibility

On 28 March 2026, in Bukavu city, South Kivu province, a vehicle belonging to NGO Héritiers de la Justice was stolen by armed men who broke into the organisation's offices. The vehicle was provided through an MSI/International Alert programme funded by USAID. Three posts on X covered the incident between 29 and 31 March, reaching a combined estimated 8,873 users with 708 engagement actions. None of the posts generated substantial engagement.

### What this tells us

- The very low reach and engagement, substantially lower than any other incident in this dataset, suggests that attacks on local NGOs in the South Kivu context do not currently generate the same online attention as incidents involving international organisations or UN staff. This disparity in visibility echoes the bias narrative identified in the Goma section. Whether the gap reflects editorial decisions, platform dynamics, or audience interests is beyond the scope of this dataset but is worth flagging to organisations monitoring the information environment.
- Criminals who are unidentified and who are likely to want to remain anonymous are much less likely to interact with an online narrative about the incident, reducing the risk of the incident being amplified via comments that want to dominate a particular interpretation or perspective.

The incidents analysed in this report represent events that surfaced on public social media platforms during the monitoring period. Social media visibility is shaped by factors including network reach, platform dynamics, and whether incidents are reported by journalists or public figures. It does not reflect the full scope of security incidents affecting the aid sector in the DRC. Incidents involving local organisations, remote areas, or events not picked up by media or public accounts may not appear in this dataset at all. Between January and April 2026, verified incidents recorded separately by Insecurity Insight included (the three incidents). These did not generate measurable public social media activity during the monitoring period.

Key numbers	
<p><b><u>Scale of analysis</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total posts: 487</li> <li>• Total comments: 1,026</li> <li>• Total estimated reach: approximately 11.4 million social media users</li> <li>• Monitoring period: 19 January – 9 April 2026</li> <li>• Platforms: X (dominant), Facebook</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Comment language</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>French:</b> 830 (80.9%)</li> <li>• <b>Lingala:</b> 12 (1.2%)</li> <li>• <b>English:</b> 128 (12.5%)</li> <li>• <b>Emojis/no text:</b> 54 (5.3%)</li> <li>• <b>Other languages:</b> 2 (0.2%) Kirundi and Mandinka</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Comment distribution by organisation type</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UN agency: 837 (81.6%)</li> <li>• UN peacekeeping: 118 (11.5%)</li> <li>• International humanitarian: 62 (6.0%)</li> <li>• LNGO/CSO: 8 (0.8%)</li> <li>• General: 1 (0.1%)</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Negative sentiment</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Negative comments:</b> 147 (14.3%)</li> </ul>

## Data Use and Privacy Disclaimer

This report includes analysis of publicly available social media content collected from open platforms. All data has been anonymised to remove or obscure identifying details, and no content from closed groups was used. The analysis was conducted in the public interest and in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), under a legitimate interest basis. The purpose of this analysis is to support humanitarian dialogue, inform policy, protect aid workers and those they help, and contribute to public interest research. This document is published by Insecurity Insight - a Humanitarian to Humanitarian (H2H) organisation committed to the Humanitarian Principles.

We welcome questions and feedback. Share what you're observing both on the ground and online. Your insights help us keep the analysis accurate and up-to-date. Email: [info@insecurityinsight.org](mailto:info@insecurityinsight.org). Join our efforts to protect humanitarian space. Subscribe to our **Social Media Monitoring** mailing list. Find more resources at the **Social Media Monitoring** website. **Help support our work by sharing this resource. Please copy and paste this link: <https://bit.ly/19Jan-09April2026DRCSMMBrief>**

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