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UN Mission Steps Up Probe in Wake of Recent Deadly Violence

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is stepping up its investigation of the situation in the country's far west, where violent clashes last week led to the deaths of more than 130 people.

Human rights officers working with the multi-disciplinary teams dispatched to Bas-Congo province by the Mission, known as MONUC, will now survey the residents of four of the towns hit hardest by the fighting, UN spokesperson Michele Montas told journalists in New York.

MONUC said that 134 people were killed, higher than previous estimates, in the clashes between Congolese security services and members of the Bunda dia Kongo religious movement. Those clashes followed disputes over closely contested local elections in Bas-Congo.

An appeals court in Bas-Congo has called on the DRC's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to organize a second round of polls for the positions of governor and vice governor of the province.

MONUC has already increased its police presence in Bas-Congo, especially in the provincial capital, Matadi, and the coastal town of Muanda, which were the scene of some of the worst violence.

Yesterday, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council both issued statements deploring the violence and calling on the newly formed national Government to work with the opposition to bring the perpetrators to justice and to resolve the underlying tensions.

Meanwhile, in the far east of the DRC, MONUC has flown a team from the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to South Kivu province to assess conditions there.

The Mission has deployed a mobile operations unit to South Kivu, which has been beset by unrest even since the formal end of the country's civil war in 1999, to help maintain public order.