

Congolese rebels leave border post

Written by reporter

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Rebels have pulled out of a border town in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo that they captured last week but remain close by as peacekeepers reinforce their presence in the region, the UN said Monday.

Forces loyal to Tutsi rebel leader Laurent Nkunda withdrew Sunday from Ishasa, located some 130 kilometres (81 miles) from Goma, the capital of eastern Nord-Kivu province, according to Jean-Paul Dietrich, spokesman for the UN's peacekeeping mission MONUC.

The town has a border post with Uganda and serves as an important source of revenue through the customs taxes it levies.

The rebel retreat came a day after Nkunda met with UN special envoy Olusegun Obasanjo on ways to secure peace in the country's volatile east, which has been torn apart by fighting since August. Nkunda has been holding out for direct talks with the government.

Nkunda's rebels advanced Thursday on a strategic axis in the region that includes Ishasa. They later said they would retreat if MONUC deployed troops to protect the area.

"We have reinforced our position on the axis since Sunday and sent a small patrol of about 20 men to Ishasa," Dietrich said.

But he was unable to confirm whether the rebels had fully retreated from the axis and said they remained nearby.

Fighting in the country's east resurged in August and has displaced some 250,000 people. The clashes pit Nkunda's forces against the government of President Joseph Kabila and various militia groups.

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In Geneva Monday, the United Nations Human Rights Council condemned human rights abuses, sexual violence and the recruitment of child soldiers in the region.