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AFRICA/DR CONGO - More than 250 Congolese refugees drown while trying to return home from Uganda

Kinshasa (Agenzia Fides) - More than 250 Congolese refugees were killed during the overturning of a boat that was bringing them back to the Democratic Republic of Congo. According to a note sent to Fides Agency by the Coordination of Civil Society of North Kivu, the tragedy occurred on March 22. The refugees had fled from the town of Watalinga, in the territory of Beni, North Kivu (eastern DRC), between July and December 2013. At first they had been welcomed in some places on the border between the DRC and Uganda. Later they were transferred by the Ugandan authorities to the refugee camp of Kyangwali (Uganda), more than 350 km from the border. When the refugees heard the news that the Congolese army had freed their villages by the presence of Ugandan ADF-NALU rebels, they asked to return to the DRC.
Two boats were made available in order to allow them to cross Lake Albert. The first boat crossed the lake without any problems, while the second, with 292 people on board sank in the middle of the lake.
According to the note sent to Fides, the accident occurred at 9 am on March 22. Only 41 people survived, including the commander and the entire crew (all Ugandans) and some refugees. The Civil society of North Kivu calls on the Congolese government to establish the circumstances of the tragedy. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 24/03/2014)

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