

Due to ceasefire breaches in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) is rethinking future intervention missions.

In 2011, the African Union launched its Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program.

This week, the continental bloc said its fourth phase of disarmament programmes in conflict zones will largely rely on local peace solutions backed by data. The programme is supported by the UN Department of Peace Operations and the World Bank.

Only strategic and “in-demand” interventions in conflicts will be prioritized with regional economic blocs and national governments allowed the lead role.

According to an AU dispatch on the AU DDR Capacity Programme, this will ensure that conflict prevention and response outcomes are fit for purpose and impactful.

The AU says the new focus will be human rights and justice as well as conflict prevention through persuasion of armed groups to join dialogue, but decisions will be informed by local data and realities, suggesting a focus on research and community involvement.

A week ago, a Kenyan soldier attached to the East African force in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo was killed following clashes with rebels.

Authorities have denied initial reports the Kenyan soldier was killed in an ambush, saying he was killed by a stray mortar bomb.

The DR Congo army said the attack was aimed at “creating a misunderstanding” between it and the EACRF.

A statement from the DR Congo army condemned the killing, blaming it on the M23.

The M23 rebels who are accused of the incident have since issued a statement accusing government forces of breaking the ceasefire.

It said the rebels fired a mortar targeting positions of the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF).

Fighting has resumed recently between the M23 rebels and a pro-government self-defence militia known as Wazalendo in parts of North Kivu province.

“The hostile clashes fatally wounded a Kenyan peacekeeper stationed at Kanyamahoro, near Kibumba, 15km from Goma. Consequently, investigations under which this incident occurred have commenced.”

In May, following the 21st Extraordinary Summit of the EAC’s Heads of State, the regional force was instructed to safeguard civilians, support the return of internally displaced persons to areas that had been vacated by armed groups, and guard the areas that had been vacated by the M23 rebels.

The ceasefire was breached, this week, Fighting between M23 rebels and pro-government armed groups in eastern DR Congo moved closer to Goma on Tuesday, with sources reporting exchanges of fire within 20 kilometres (12 miles) of the city.

The conflict has recently intensified around Goma, North Kivu’s capital and home to over a million people, with M23 rebels and armed groups loyal to the government breaking a precarious truce.

Officially, the army is respecting the ceasefire, but witnesses say that soldiers and the pro-government loyalists are fighting together against the M23.

“The situation is getting worse and worse. Both sides are exchanging heavy weapons fire,” a resident said. “We’re having to flee.”

The fighting, which is also affecting Nyiragongo territory closer to Goma, has claimed dozens of lives in recent weeks.

Independent UN experts, the Kinshasa government and several Western nations including the United States and France accuse Rwanda of backing the Tutsi-led M23 – which Kigali denies.

Last week, Rwanda said one of its citizens died from a stray bullet originating from the clashes among the coalition of “Kinshasa-backed illegal armed groups” in eastern DRC, close to the Rwandan border.

“Rwanda is deeply concerned by the ongoing support and collaboration of the Government of the DRC with FDLR, other illegal armed groups, and foreign mercenaries, which is escalating provocative actions along the Rwandan border, in

violation of the Luanda and Nairobi processes,” said a statement from Kigali.

The latest accusations signal broken relations that could raise tensions between the two neighbours, thereby hurting the Nairobi Process.