

Burundi closed all its land borders with Rwanda this Thursday, a development that comes two weeks after the country accused its northern neighbor of supporting rebels who allegedly carried out a deadly attack in Gatumba, Burundi.

The border closure announcement was made on Thursday, by the Burundian Minister of the Interior, Martin Niteretse while in Kayanza, a province bordering Rwanda. The minister cites reasons of border closure to “bad neighborliness of Paul Kagame,’ for hosting of his country’s enemies.

Burundian President Evariste Ndayishimiye, during a speech to the Nation on December 31, 2023, accused Rwanda of supporting the Red-Tabara rebel group. He accused the rebels of perpetrating an attack where 19 civilians and a police officer were killed.

According to the Burundian head of state, this rebel movement is supported and is headquartered in Rwanda, an allegation that the Kigali administration denies.

The Rwandan government said in a brief statement that it regrets the “UNILATERAL BORDER CLOSURE BY BURUNDI.”

“The Government of Rwanda has learned through media reports of the unilateral decision by the Government of Burundi to again close its borders with Rwanda.” Says the statement. Adding that “This unfortunate decision will restrict the free movement of people and goods between the two countries, and violates the principles of regional cooperation and integration of the East African Community.”

Kigali has denied accusations of supporting Burundian rebels giving proof of handing over Burundian rebels from the RED Tabara rebels, who had illegally entered Rwandan soil.

The handover of these rebels took place under the supervision of the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism (EJVM) of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR).

Previously, Rwanda-Burundi borders were last closed between 2015 and 2022. Since then, the two countries had embarked on a process aimed at normalizing relations, although Burundi has insisted of returning back home the 2015 coup plot suspects who fled to Rwanda. However, Rwanda indicated that this request went against the ratified International Convention on the Protection of Refugees.

In any case, this closure of the borders between Burundi and Rwanda decreed by Burundi goes against the principles of integration of the East African region and the continent, and it harms the interests of countries and people.