

A joint ceasefire verification mission began work in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo on Monday, a day after Kinshasa and the AFC/M23 agreed on a roadmap to move their peace negotiations forward.

The first mission under the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism Plus, or EJVM+, was deployed to Minembwe in South Kivu, where representatives of the Congolese government and AFC/M23 are taking part alongside observers from member countries of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

The deployment follows five days of talks in Switzerland from Aug. 17 to 21, during which the two sides reviewed the implementation of commitments under the Doha peace process and agreed on steps and timelines for negotiations on outstanding issues.

The parties also agreed on the need for a standardized method of reporting alleged ceasefire violations, according to a joint statement issued after the Swiss meetings. The EJVM+ secretariat has been established to support the mechanism, while a reconnaissance mission was conducted in Minembwe on Aug. 20 with logistical support from the United Nations mission in Congo, MONUSCO.

Minembwe was chosen for the first verification mission because of continuing security tensions in the area. The mission is also expected to visit Uvira and Kalehe, according to South Kivu authorities cited by AFP.

The monitoring mechanism comes as the two sides continue to accuse each other of violating the ceasefire. The competing claims have often been difficult to independently verify, particularly in areas where access for humanitarian and international organizations remains limited.

The DRC government on Monday accused AFC/M23 of serious human rights violations in areas under its control and said more than 300 people had been killed in June and July. AFC/M23, meanwhile, accused government forces of carrying out an artillery attack near Minembwe.

The latest developments follow previous attempts to halt fighting in eastern Congo, where AFC/M23 has seized large areas of territory and millions of people have been displaced. The latest Swiss discussions were part of the Qatar-mediated Doha process between the Congolese government and AFC/M23.

The new roadmap is intended to guide negotiations on the remaining protocols under the Doha Framework for a Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The parties have also agreed to establish a mechanism to review progress and address difficulties in implementing commitments already reached.

For now, the ceasefire verification mission faces the immediate task of documenting reported violations on the ground and giving both sides a common process for raising and examining complaints.