Gunfire echoed through Bukavu on the morning of Saturday, February 15, as M23 rebels reportedly took control of strategic locations across the city.

Witnesses described armed men occupying the governor’s office, the town hall, and the northern entrance of Kazingo, creating widespread fear among residents.

Amid the takeover, Bukavu descended into chaos, with reports of looting spreading across several neighborhoods. On Friday evening, February 13, violence erupted in the Kadutu commune, where youths broke into shops, stealing goods before setting parts of the market on fire.

The destruction left local businesses in ruins, with residents seen carrying away stolen bags of rice and other supplies the next morning.

The looting extended to warehouses near the Brasserie facilities and Independence Square, where rebels reportedly vandalized shops as they solidified their hold on the city. On the road leading to Uvira, more armed groups were spotted ransacking businesses, intensifying the panic among civilians who remained indoors to avoid the violence.

Most political and administrative officials had already fled before the city’s capture, leaving a leadership vacuum. From undisclosed locations, some officials, including Provincial Minister of Interior Albert Kahasha, issued messages on social media urging residents to maintain order and protect property. However, these calls seemed futile as looting continued unabated.

With socio-economic activities completely paralyzed, Bukavu remains in turmoil, and it is unclear how or when the city will regain stability according to reports.

The unrest in Bukavu coincides with the conclusion of the African Union (AU) Summit, where leaders discussed security challenges across the continent. While the summit addressed broader regional stability, including conflicts in Sudan and the Sahel, the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains a pressing concern.

The AU’s stance on the M23 rebellion and its implications for regional security is yet to be clearly outlined. However, with violence escalating in Bukavu, the need for an urgent diplomatic or military response grows more apparent.

As the dust settles, the residents of Bukavu face an uncertain future, with fears of

prolonged instability and further economic collapse looming large.