A highly anticipated peace summit aimed at resolving the escalating conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was abruptly cancelled this Sunday after negotiations reached a deadlock. The talks, scheduled in Luanda, Angola, were expected to bring together President Paul Kagame and DRC President Félix Tshisekedi, with hopes of reaching a breakthrough.

Angolan President João Lourenço, serving as the African Union-appointed mediator, confirmed the cancellation. “Contrary to what we expected, the summit will no longer be held today,” stated Mario Jorge, a spokesperson for Angola’s presidency. Lourenço proceeded to meet alone with President Tshisekedi, but it remained unclear whether President Kagame was in Angola at all.

The primary stumbling block appears to have been Rwanda’s insistence that the DRC engage in direct talks with the M23 rebels, a group Kigali is accused of backing. The Congolese presidency rejected this demand, reiterating its long-held position that the M23 are “terrorists” and part of an ongoing Rwandan aggression against Congolese sovereignty.

“Our country continues to face persistent rebellions, including the aggression by the Rwandan army and the M23 terrorists,” President Tshisekedi said earlier in the week, referring to Rwanda and the M23 rebels as “enemies of the Republic.”

Since its resurgence in 2021, the M23 militia—composed primarily of ethnic Tutsis—has seized swathes of territory in North Kivu province. The group claims to defend the rights of Congolese Tutsis, but Kinshasa accuses Rwanda of using the group to advance its economic and geopolitical interests. Rwanda denies involvement, instead pointing to the presence of the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda), a militia formed by ethnic Hutus involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Efforts to stabilize the region had previously shown signs of progress. In early August, Angola mediated a fragile ceasefire agreement, which briefly reduced fighting along the front lines. However, clashes between M23 rebels and the Congolese army have intensified since late October, with the rebel group surrounding Goma, the capital of North Kivu, a city of over one million residents and an additional one million displaced by war.

A monitoring committee involving Angola, Rwanda, and the DRC was launched in November to oversee ceasefire violations. This led to the development of a

“concept of operations” document that detailed plans for Rwanda’s troop withdrawal from Congolese territory. However, the agreement stipulated that the neutralization of the FDLR would occur simultaneously with Rwanda’s disengagement—a condition that Kinshasa rejected.

Instead, the final plan, seen by AFP, allowed a 90-day window to dismantle the FDLR while Rwanda lifted its “defensive measures.” Yet, this arrangement remains contentious and fragile, with both sides accusing each other of non-compliance.

The situation in eastern DRC has become dire. Fighting has displaced thousands, exacerbating an already critical humanitarian crisis. The mineral-rich region remains home to dozens of armed groups, many of whom exploit the insecurity for profit.

For Rwanda, the FDLR remains a key concern. Kigali portrays the group as a direct threat to its national security, justifying its military incursions into Congolese territory. Kinshasa, however, views Rwanda’s actions as an excuse to destabilize its eastern region and exploit its natural resources.

The Rwandan Minister of Foreign Affairs Olivier Nduhungire wrote on x formerly twitter, “Rwanda is surprised by the statements made by the President of the DRC, referring to theories similar to those of the ‘great replacement’ promoted by the far-right in Europe, which is dangerous and fuels xenophobia against the Congolese Tutsi in eastern DRC.

Such claims are irresponsible on the eve of the Luanda summit, one of whose key issues is the DRC’s commitment to direct dialogue with its compatriots in the M23, who are members of this marginalized Congolese Tutsi community, while more than 1.45 million internally displaced people have returned to North Kivu, according to United Nations reports.

Moreover, it is illogical to claim that Rwandan citizens would leave a peaceful country for a war zone, plagued by daily violence and ethnic persecution committed by hundreds of local militias, including the Wazalendo, and by the genocidal FDLR, supported by Kinshasa.”

The continued stalemate not only jeopardizes regional stability but also complicates diplomatic mediation efforts. President Lourenço had expressed optimism earlier in the week, stating that the Luanda summit might pave the way for a “long-lasting peace agreement between the two neighboring countries.” Instead, the cancellation

underscores the deep mistrust and entrenched positions that continue to fuel the conflict

The failure of the Luanda summit highlights the complexity of the conflict. Despite past mediation efforts and direct international involvement, achieving lasting peace in eastern DRC remains elusive. Angola’s leadership and the African Union’s role as mediator will be critical in maintaining momentum for further talks.

Observers emphasize that addressing the root causes of the conflict—particularly the role of regional militias, natural resource exploitation, and historical grievances—will be essential. While both Rwanda and the DRC have publicly committed to dialogue, the path forward remains fraught with challenges.

For now, the people of eastern DRC remain trapped in a cycle of violence and uncertainty, with no clear resolution in sight.