The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) clashed with the Congo River Alliance (AFC), linked to the M23 rebels, on Tuesday morning in the Kazaiba Walungu territory in South Kivu.

Residents say the fighting started around 3 a.m., with heavy gunfire and explosions that continued for hours. People were forced to stay inside their homes as the two sides maneuvered for control in the Kaziba highlands. The clashes have focused on Nguka Hill, where both forces are trying to dominate strategic positions in Kaziba town. Military sources reported the use of surface-to-air missiles, heightening fears for civilians living in the area.

The violence is reported to be spreading across the Ruzizi Plain, affecting Katogota, Luvungi, Lubarika, and Kamanyola. In Kamanyola, a shell reportedly hit a residential house, killing people, although exact numbers are not yet available. The humanitarian situation is worsening: roads are blocked, supplies cannot reach residents, and aid agencies are struggling to operate in the region.

This outbreak of violence comes as regional leaders prepare to meet in Washington on Thursday. United States President Donald Trump will host Rwandan President Paul Kagame and DRC President Félix Tshisekedi to sign a peace and economic cooperation agreement.

Kenya’s President William Ruto and Burundi’s President Évariste Ndayishimiye will attend as witnesses.

Analysts say the clashes in Ruzizi highlight just how urgent the Washington talks are. “The violence reminds us that the people on the ground are living in constant fear,” said one local observer. “Diplomacy cannot wait while lives are being lost.”

The summit in Washington is being closely watched across the Great Lakes region, as leaders hope the agreement will finally bring a lasting solution to displace millions.