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President Paul Kagame has offered one of his clearest and most forceful defenses yet of Rwanda’s security stance as tensions with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continues to simmer, pushing back against what he sees as uneven international pressure on Kigali.

In an interview with Jeune Afrique, Kagame dismissed calls for Rwanda to scale back its defensive posture, arguing that such demands overlook both the roots of the conflict and what he described as increasingly assertive rhetoric from Kinshasa.

“Don’t expect me to lift our defensive measures while you allow Félix Tshisekedi to do whatever he wants,” Kagame said.

His comments come against the backdrop of strained relations between the two neighbors, with mutual accusations over insecurity in eastern Congo, an area long troubled by armed groups and shifting alliances.

Kagame cast Rwanda’s position as a response to persistent threats rather than an escalation, placing responsibility for the broader crisis on the Congolese side.

“The problem is that of the DRC, not Rwanda,” he said. “This problem has lasted for nearly thirty years.”

He pointed to a track record of unfulfilled agreements between Kigali and Kinshasa, suggesting that past experience has left Rwanda wary of relying on assurances that fail to materialize.

“We have signed several agreements with the DRC since 2007; none have been respected,” he said.

Those frustrations linger despite renewed diplomatic efforts in recent years, including a U.S.-backed peace push during former President Donald Trump’s administration. While the initiative raised hopes of easing tensions, implementation has been uneven, and mistrust remains on both sides.

Central to Rwanda’s concerns is the continued presence of the FDLR, an armed group linked to perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Kagame did not temper his language.

“The FDLR is a genocidal force,” he said.

He added that Rwanda’s concerns are grounded in ongoing risks rather than history alone.

“If they were not directed against Rwanda, it would not be our problem,” he said.

Rwanda has long argued that the group represents a direct threat to its security, a position it says justifies maintaining a firm military posture along its borders.

Kagame also took aim at what he described as selective scrutiny from Western governments, which have increasingly called on Rwanda to de-escalate while raising concerns about its alleged role in eastern Congo.

“Rwanda is presented as the problem, when that is not the case,” he said.

Some international partners have floated the possibility of sanctions, but Kagame signaled that such pressure would not shift Rwanda’s approach.

“If I must choose between an existential threat and sanctions, I will choose to confront the threat,” he said.

Analysts say the remarks reflect a broader stance in Kigali that places security considerations above diplomatic costs, even as international criticism grows.

Congolese authorities, for their part, have repeatedly accused Rwanda of interference, allegations Rwanda denies, adding to the already fragile relationship.

Kagame warned that the current trajectory risks further destabilizing the region if tensions continue to rise unchecked.

“You cannot fear a fire while adding fuel to it,” he said.

While he stopped short of predicting open conflict, his comments underline just how delicate the situation remains, with both sides holding firm and little sign, for now, of a breakthrough.