

Significant movements of AFC/M23 rebel forces were observed overnight between Monday and Tuesday, March 24, as fighters reportedly abandoned long-held positions across several localities in the Lubero territory.

While the shift has sparked hope for a potential de-escalation, provincial authorities are urging the public and observers to exercise extreme caution, noting that the intent behind the movement remains unclear.

According to local reports, rebel camps and strategic positions that had been occupied for over a year have been completely vacated. The withdrawal affects several villages located within a 15 to 25-kilometer radius of Lubero-Centre, including: Kipese, Munyakondomi, Ivatama, Ilambula, Luseke and Musimba

Witnesses state that the fighters retreated with their full military hardware, heading toward unidentified areas in the southern reaches of the territory.

Despite the departures from the aforementioned villages, security sources confirm that the AFC/M23 has not completely exited the region. The group maintains a presence in Katondi, which is now considered its last forward position. M23 have not made any comment.

Katondi sits approximately 15 kilometers from Lubero-Centre and is situated near the buffer zone currently controlled by the Ugandan army (UPDF). This proximity keeps the regional capital within a sensitive security perimeter.

The Administrator of the Lubero territory, Colonel Alain Kiwewa, confirmed the reports of the withdrawal but refused to label the movement a “victory” or a definitive retreat.

“At this stage, it is difficult to determine whether this is a genuine withdrawal, an internal rotation, or a redeployment of rebels to reinforce other positions,” Col. Kiwewa stated.

Military and administrative authorities are currently awaiting further intelligence to determine if these maneuvers signify a tactical shift or a broader change in the security landscape of North Kivu.