

Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo have signed a landmark agreement in Washington, committing to respect each other's sovereignty and to draft a peace deal by May 2.

The pact, witnessed by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, is part of renewed diplomatic efforts to end decades of violence in eastern Congo.

The agreement comes amid an unprecedented advance by M23 rebels—who have seized control of major cities, including Goma and Bukavu in North Kivu and South Kivu provinces respectively.

The surge in violence has displaced hundreds of thousands and raised fears of a broader regional conflict.

In the agreement, both nations pledged to refrain from supporting armed groups and to explore the creation of a joint security coordination mechanism to combat militias and criminal organizations. Although previous ceasefire attempts have often failed, the new deal raises cautious optimism for a breakthrough.

Rwandan Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhungerehe described the accord as a potential gateway to a lasting peace. "We are discussing how to build new regional economic value chains that link our countries, including with American private sector investment," he noted.

"To our countrymen and women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, especially in the east, we know you are watching this moment," said Congo's Foreign Minister Thérèse Kayikwamba Wagner during the signing ceremony. "You have every reason to expect more than promises."

As part of the broader agreement, Washington is expected to facilitate significant public and private investments in the region's rich mineral sector. Congo's eastern provinces hold vast deposits of tantalum, gold, copper, cobalt, and lithium—critical minerals for technologies like smartphones and electric vehicles. Rwanda has also confirmed discussions with the U.S. about a possible minerals deal.

"A durable peace in the Great Lakes region will open the door for greater U.S. and broader Western investment, which will bring about economic opportunities and prosperity," Secretary Rubio said at the ceremony.

Despite the positive diplomatic signals, fighting reportedly continued on Friday in

North Kivu province. Officials say more than 7,000 people have been killed in eastern Congo since January. Both DR Congo and M23 leaders have separately expressed commitment to finding a permanent ceasefire in recent days.

While the road to peace remains uncertain, the Washington agreement is being hailed as an important step toward ending one of Africa's most intractable conflicts—one rooted in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda exacerbated by competition over the region's natural resources.

Whether this latest initiative can finally bring stability to the troubled region remains to be seen.