

By Jejje Muhinde;

Rwanda Defence Forces (RDF) say it has sent 1,000 security personnel to Cabo Delgado province in northern Mozambique to help fight Islamist militants who have terrorized the region.

Rwandan authorities said they have begun deploying a 1,000-strong joint force of soldiers and police to Mozambique to help suppress the insurgency in the northern Cabo Delgado province, the Rwandan Ministry of Defence announced.

“A contingent of 1,000 Rwandan troops and police began arriving in Cabo Delgado last Friday, well in advance of the SADC Standby Force, which is expected to start deployment on 15 July”

“The joint force will closely work with Mozambique Armed Defence Forces and forces from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in designated sectors of responsibility,” Rwandan authorities said in a statement.

SADC countries agreed last month to deploy forces to troubled Cabo Delgado but have yet to announce the size of the force or a timeline. Rwanda is not a member of the 16-country bloc.

But as of July 9, 2021 Mozambique had still not given official clearance for the deployment.

SADC’s deployment also seems to have been complicated by a dispute within SADC about which country should lead the SADC standby force.

Then on Monday, Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi declared that SADC has given its consent to the deployment of troops from Rwanda in the fight against Islamist terrorists in the northern province of Cabo Delgado.

Cabo Delgado is also still reeling from consecutive climatic shocks, including 2019’s Cyclone Kenneth, the strongest tropical storm to hit the northern part of Mozambique, and massive floods in early 2020.

Speaking to Mozambican military units at Muxungue, in the central province of Sofala, Nyusi is quoted to have said “We are a sovereign country. SADC respects this. It has allowed and accepts that we can work in a bilateral manner. We are going to work with our brothers from Rwanda who are arriving”.

It is easier to work bilaterally, he added, because there is a single command, which is not the case in multilateral cooperation, when there are multiple commands.

He stressed that it is Mozambique that will take leadership of the military command, because the Mozambican defence and security forces know the terrain best.

“Those who know Muidumbe, those who know Quissanga, those who know Matemo (two districts and an island in Cabo Delgado) are the defence and security forces of Mozambique”, he stressed.

At least 700,000 people, including at least 364,000 children, are now displaced in the provinces of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Niassa, Sofala and Zambezia as a result of violence and insecurity.

At least 2,852 people have reportedly died in the conflict, including 1,409 civilians, although this number includes only reported deaths and it is expected that the true number is much higher.