South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir Mayardit, who also serves as the Chairperson of the East African Community (EAC), arrived in Rwanda on Thursday for a working visit.

His arrival coincides with simmering tensions in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) between the M23 rebel group and the Congolese government forces.

President Kiir’s visit to Kigali comes as the African Union Commission (AUC) Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, reiterates calls for de-escalation. The M23 rebels have made significant advances in recent weeks, raising fears of a potential takeover of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province.

The visit also follows accusations from the Congolese government that Rwanda supports the M23 rebels, which Rwanda vehemently denies. Rwanda maintains that the conflict stems from internal issues within DRC, including poor governance, ethnic tensions, and ongoing violence.

The AUC Chairperson has urged regional leaders, particularly those of DRC and Rwanda, to prioritize dialogue through existing African mechanisms led by Presidents João Lourenço of Angola and Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya. The goal is to find a collaborative solution to address the underlying political differences.

Both the AUC and the Rwandan government have expressed concerns about the potential spillover effects of the conflict on the wider Great Lakes Region, particularly considering the Congolese government’s withdrawal from regional peace processes.

President Kiir’s visit to Rwanda, while ostensibly a working visit, takes place against the backdrop of simmering regional instability. The outcome of his discussions and the potential impact on the ongoing conflict in eastern DRC remain to be seen.