Top military officials from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) arrived in Goma, the capital of the embattled North Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on Saturday.

Their visit coincided with ongoing clashes between government troops and M23 rebels, raising hopes for a renewed commitment to regional security efforts.

The SADC chiefs held a high-level meeting to “assess the progress of operations on the ground and fine-tune strategies for strengthening them,” according to Congolese army spokesperson, General Sylvain Ekenge.

This visit, coming just two days after SADC armored vehicles were attacked by M23, is seen as a strong signal of SADC and Burundi’s commitment to supporting the DRC.

While some residents welcomed the visit, hoping it would provide firsthand understanding of the dire security situation, others remained skeptical about its impact.

Placide Nzilamba, a member of Goma civil society, expressed optimism, stating, “We think it has enabled them to understand the situation and the reality of insecurity on the ground.”

However, Muisa Christian, another resident, was less hopeful, believing “the future of the Congo’s security lies in internal strategies” rather than external interventions.

The M23 offensive, launched in 2021, has resulted in the capture of significant territory in North Kivu, displacing countless civilians.

Aid organizations fear this new escalation could trigger a humanitarian crisis, potentially cutting off Goma and leaving millions without access to basic necessities like food and medical care.

The eastern DRC has grappled with armed group violence for decades, and the M23 conflict further exacerbates the long-standing instability in the region.

The SADC visit, amidst these complexities, signifies an attempt to address the escalating conflict and alleviate the suffering of the affected population.