

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has announced a major shift in its peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), launching a military offensive against M23 rebels.

This escalation follows a deadly attack on a displaced persons camp (IDP) in Goma, attributed to the M23 group, which sparked international condemnation.

“The SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC) will work alongside the Congolese National Army (FARDC) with a three-pronged approach: opening critical supply routes currently blocked by M23 activity, protecting civilians from intimidation, displacement, and violence, and ultimately creating a secure environment that allows communities to resume daily life,” said SADC in a statement on Sunday night.

The attack on the IDP camp blamed on M23, reportedly claimed the lives of at least 16 civilians, drew outrage from the international community.

The United States strongly condemned the attack and expressed concern about the growing M23 presence in eastern DRC, which has displaced millions.

SADC echoed this sentiment, calling the attack on the camp a “blatant violation of international humanitarian law.”

Rwanda, accused by the US of backing the M23 rebels, has vehemently denied any involvement in the IDP camp attack. Rwanda further refused to accept responsibility for the DRC’s security challenges.

This marks a significant change for SADC, which previously focused on peacekeeping efforts in the DRC. This is the first time they have taken an offensive stance since deploying nearly 10,000 troops in December 2023. Both DRC and SADC forces are reportedly deploying heavy weaponry in preparation for a large-scale assault on M23 positions.

The SADC emphasized their commitment to upholding human rights during the operation, stating their actions will comply with international law and the laws of the DRC.