

Luanda, the Angolan capital is hosting the summit of heads of state of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) this Saturday, November 4.

The meeting aims to make progress on the deployment of military forces expected soon in the DRC and which has been under discussion since May 8.

The deployment of SADC troops in the DRC would only be a matter of weeks, according to several Congolese officials.

The latter add that three countries in the region have announced themselves as troop contributors: South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania.

This Saturday's summit should make it possible to set the final modalities after several meetings at the level of chiefs of staff and ministers.

Unhappy with the results of the regional force deployed by the East African Community, Kinshasa turned to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for help trying to regain control of its eastern territory.

In May this year, SADC members who met in Gaborone, Botswana , agreed to send troops to DRC to help quell disturbances in east of DR=Congo.

At the end of a special SADC meeting in Windhoek, Namibia, Namibian President Hage Geingob said the security situation in eastern DRC is cause for concern.

"The summit reiterated SADC's solidarity to assist the government and people of the Republic of Congo in its efforts to restore peace and stability in the eastern part of the country, particularly in light of the upcoming national elections scheduled for December 2023," said Geingob, who serves as chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Security and Defense.

Reading out the Windhoek Summit's resolution, SADC Executive Secretary Elias Magosi said the meeting resolved to send troops to the DRC to assist in ending hostilities.

DRC political leaders hope the SADC troops will take quick action to contain rebel groups.

"The question is, how will the co-existence between the SADC brigade and the forces of the EAC be?" Paul Diakese, DRC President Felix Tshisekedi's information

officer, said in a report. “One thing is certain, the mandate of the SADC brigade will be offensive compared to the friends of the EAC who only have a buffer force role.”

It was unclear how many SADC troops will be deployed to the restive region and how long they will be there.

South Africa, an SADC member, already has 1,184 soldiers deployed in the DRC under the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the DRC, known as MONUSCO.

The conflict has heightened in the DRC’s North Kivu province, where hundreds have been killed and more than 300,000 displaced in fighting between M23 rebels and government forces.

DR-Congo President Felix Tshisekedi has said that EACRF forces may be expelled by June if their mandate is not fulfilled. EACRF troops from Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda are currently operating in eastern DRC. Tanzania’s commitment to deploying troops as part of the EACRF is unclear.

Tshisekedi has been critical of the EACRF since it was deployed to eastern DRC in November 2022, saying that it has not enforced the withdrawal of the M23. Multiple cease-fires with the group have been broken. In mid-May, the Congolese Army and M23 accused one another of violating the most recent agreement.

The EACRF has had some success. Since arriving in Goma, capital of the North Kivu province, the force has secured critical infrastructure, including the international airport and its surrounding areas, which are full of impromptu refugee camps.

The EACRF’s presence also has forced the M23 from Karuba, Mushaki, Neenero, Kiorirwe, Kibirizi, Mweso and adjacent areas, the EACRF said in a statement. EACRF will meet soon in Bujumbura to determine their stay or leave DR-Congo.

Meanwhile, the MONUSCO and the national army FARDC have launched a joint operation dubbed Springbok at NordKivu designed to stop the advance of M23 armed groups towards Saké and Goma. “Our troops are deployed throughout the region,” confides the commander of the Force of the MONUSCO said.

The announcement made this Wednesday follows a surge of clashes with the armed group M23 since last month which forced over 200,000 people from their homes, according to a UN report, after a period of relative calm.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in early May urged African leaders to intensify efforts to stabilize eastern DRC.

“It is time for the violence to stop,” Guterres said in an Agence France-Presse report. “I reiterate my call to all armed groups — lay down your arms, immediately.”