

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has firmly denied accusations by the M23 rebel group that its military mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is collaborating with Congolese forces and other militia groups against the rebels in Goma, North Kivu.

In a statement issued on Monday, April 14, SADC dismissed the claims as “inaccurate and misleading,” emphasizing that the mission strictly adheres to its mandate and is currently undergoing a structured withdrawal from Congolese territory. This withdrawal is in line with the decisions made at the SADC Heads of State Summit, and part of ongoing efforts to de-escalate tensions in eastern DRC.

The regional bloc also reaffirmed its commitment to the March 28, 2025 advisory agreement held in Goma with the M23 leadership, urging all parties to act responsibly and refrain from spreading misinformation that could undermine peace efforts.

The statement follows a weekend of deadly violence in eastern DRC that left over dozens dead, according to local authorities. The killings occurred between Friday and Saturday, further stoking tensions in a region already on edge.

The Congolese government and the M23 rebel group have traded blame over the weekend clashes, with both sides accusing each other of igniting the bloodshed. Residents in and around Goma, which has been under M23 control since January, reported heavy fighting that many say marks the most serious escalation in months, threatening fragile peace efforts led by Qatar and African Union nations.

The protracted conflict, which has simmered for over a decade, took a dramatic turn earlier this year when M23 rebels seized the strategic city of Goma, followed by the capture of Bukavu in February. The renewed hostilities have killed over 3,000 people in recent months and further worsened what the United Nations calls one of the world’s largest humanitarian crises, with around 7 million people now displaced across the country.

In a separate statement, M23 spokesperson Lawrence Kanyuka accused the Congolese army and its allies—specifically naming SADC and local militias—of launching coordinated attacks that endangered civilians. “The joint operations directly threaten the stability and security of the population,” Kanyuka said, adding that the group may be forced to reconsider its stance in order to “prioritize the security” of the local population—a warning that suggests the conflict could spiral

further.

International efforts to mediate the crisis are ongoing, with stakeholders warning that failure to de-escalate could trigger a wider regional conflict. The African Union and United Nations continue to push for diplomatic solutions, while humanitarian agencies call for increased aid as displacement, food insecurity, and violence intensify.