

Tanzania will host a joint summit of the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) this Friday, this follows an agreement between the chairmen of the two regional blocs.

The agreement was reached between Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa, the current SADC chairman, and Kenyan President William Ruto, EAC Chairman.

The crisis in eastern DRC escalated in recent months, with clashes between Congolese army and the M23 rebel group displacing thousands of civilians. The fighting has also spilled over into neighboring countries, raising concerns about the potential for the conflict to destabilize the broader Great Lakes region.

Kenyan President William Ruto, who chairs the East African Community (EAC), made the announcement on Monday evening.

Ruto confirmed that a joint summit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the EAC will take place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on Friday and Saturday, focusing on the deteriorating security situation in eastern DRC.

“President Samia Suluhu Hassan has graciously agreed to host the summit to deliberate on the situation in Eastern DRC,” President Ruto said in a post on X.

He also confirmed that both presidents Tshisekedi and Kagame had confirmed they would attend the summit, which will be preceded by a ministerial meeting on Friday before the heads of state convene on Saturday.

Ruto also said he had engaged presidents Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, Uganda’s Yoweri Museveni and Somalia’s Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, all of whom confirmed their participation in the extraordinary summit.

The Congolese leader has previously refused to share a table with Kagame and has been hesitant to engage directly with Ruto, whom Kinshasa perceives as leaning towards Rwanda. Tshisekedi has consistently snubbed EAC-led initiatives, favouring the SADC bloc for military and diplomatic intervention in the mineral-rich region.

Last week, while Kagame attended the EAC summit, Tshisekedi opted for the SADC meeting, reinforcing his reliance on the Southern African bloc rather than the EAC to resolve the crisis.

Tanzania, a member of both SADC and EAC, is a crucial player in the mediation process. It has already deployed troops to eastern DRC under the SADC mission (SAMIDRC) with a mandate to conduct offensive operations against the M23 rebels.

SADC, comprising 16 member states including Angola, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, has taken a hardline stance in backing Kinshasa militarily. In contrast, the EAC, which includes Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, South Sudan, and Somalia, has struggled to maintain unity on the issue, with divisions over engagement with the M23 rebels.

In a significant development, M23 announced a ceasefire starting February 4, 2025, citing humanitarian concerns in the eastern DRC. The group condemned the Congolese army (FARDC) for what it described as the reckless use of military aircraft targeting civilians in areas under its control.

M23 clarified that it has no intention of capturing Bukavu or expanding its territorial hold and reaffirmed its commitment to protecting civilians. It also called for the immediate withdrawal of SAMIDRC forces, arguing that their mission is no longer justified.

The timing of the ceasefire aligns with the upcoming summit, raising speculation over whether it signals a shift towards dialogue or a strategic manoeuvre to consolidate territorial gains.

The upcoming summit will be the first of its kind, bringing together the two blocs to address the crisis.

Whether it yields tangible results remains to be seen, but all eyes will be on who ultimately shows up — and what comes next.