

Reports from the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) indicate that M23 rebels allegedly killed thirteen South African foreign peacekeepers in DRC.

According to a statement from the South African Defence Force (SANDF), a two-day battle saw nine SANDF members lose their lives during the operation, which concluded on Friday, January 24, 2025.

Seven of the fallen were part of the South African contingent deployed in the DRC under the 16-member regional bloc SADC Mission (SAMIDRC), while two were members of MONUSCO. Several soldiers also sustained injuries, with the exact numbers yet to be confirmed.

The statement said that SANDF “not only halted the M23 advancement but also pushed them back.” The rebels, who had launched a full-scale attack aimed at seizing the city of Goma, were met with heavy resistance from the SANDF contingent.

South Africa Minister of Defence Angie Motshekga, along with senior officials, expressed their heartfelt condolences to the families of the fallen soldiers, acknowledging their bravery and sacrifice in the fight for peace and stability in the region. Efforts to inform the families are currently underway.

“The intention of the M23, amongst others, is to take over the city of Goma, but it met with heavy resistance from the SANDF contingent,” the statement further noted.

Fighting between the M23 and the Congolese army (FARDC) has intensified since the start of the year, with the rebels seizing control of more territory than ever before. The M23 has taken control of vast swathes of mineral-rich eastern DRC since 2021.

This week, the M23 fighters killed a Congolese military governor who was visiting the frontline on Thursday. Earlier in January, they captured the key eastern Congolese towns of Minova and Masisi.

According to reports, the situation remained tense on Saturday, in the areas of fighting between the Congolese army (FARDC) and its allies against the M23 rebels:

On the axis Kasengesi-Mubambiro, around the town of Sake, as well as on the axis Kanyamahoro-Kibumba, in the territory of Nyiragongo (North-Kivu), local sources

reported hearing explosions of heavy weapons and light arms almost every Friday night, continuing until Saturday, January 25, and increasing panic in the city of Goma.

The FARDC, supported by allies including the Wazalendo, MONUSCO, and the regional force SAMI-DRC, were continuing attempts to liberate the towns of Mubambiro and Matcha, which are still occupied by the rebel M23 around the center of Sake.

On the side of Kibumba, north of Goma, the army has once again countered, in the night of Friday to Saturday, a new attempt by the rebels to attack its strategic positions of Kanyamahoro and Kilima-Nyoka, in the group of Buhumba.

General Sylvain Ekenge, the spokesperson for the FARDC, stated on Saturday, January 25, that the army will not allow rebels to “enter Goma.” Speaking alongside government spokesperson Patrick Muyaya and Minister of Foreign Trade Julien Paluku, he declared, “The war hasn’t truly begun—it starts now. We will not let them reach Goma.”

He added, “Fighting continues, and with the support of Wazalendo, MONUSCO, and SAMIDRC, we’ve pushed back the enemy. The FARDC and our allies remain resolute against these Rwandan-backed incursions.”

The international community has condemned the violence, with French President Emmanuel Macron, the EU’s foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, and Angolan President Joao Lourenco, the African Union’s mediator between Rwanda and DRC, all calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities.

The United Nations is pulling all non-essential staff out of Goma – a city of more than one million people – as the fighting intensifies. Human Rights Watch has warned of escalating risks to civilians as the Congolese army battles the M23 rebels, accusing both sides of committing grave abuses.

The conflict has already led more than 400,000 people to flee their homes this year, according to the UN. A UN Security Council meeting to discuss the conflict, originally set for Monday, has been moved to Sunday due to the escalating situation.

DRC and the UN say the M23 is backed by Rwanda, though the Rwandan authorities have neither confirmed nor denied this. Rwanda has previously accused the

Congolese authorities of working with those responsible for the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi.

A planned meeting for peace talks between the presidents of Rwanda and DRC did not take place as planned last December. The event was meant to see a rare face-to-face meeting between President Paul Kagame and President Felix Tshisekedi to sign a peace deal that would raise hopes of an end to the standoff in the eastern Congo.