

Eastern DR Congo short of peace

Eastern DR Congo is not short of peace initiatives; it is short of peace. A new mediation track emerges, a ceasefire is announced, and a communiqué promises de-escalation. Yet civilians in North Kivu and South Kivu continue to pay the price.

Angola's President João Lourenço proposed a ceasefire to begin on February 18, and the Congolese government accepted the principle of a ceasefire linked to a freeze of positions (Africanews, 2026). That announcement mattered because it signalled political willingness to stop the slide. However, a ceasefire is not peace, and a press statement is not compliance.

Qatar also reported that the UN would deploy a ceasefire-monitoring team following Doha-mediated engagement connected to a truce mechanism (Reuters, 2026). Monitoring is essential because, in the absence of verified information, rumours replace facts and escalation becomes framed as self-defence. Still, monitoring alone cannot resolve the problem. In eastern DR Congo, multiple conflicts operate simultaneously.

One of the quieter reasons mediation repeatedly fails in eastern DR Congo is that those who live the conflict are rarely treated as parties to the solution.

A negotiation that treats DR Congo as a single table with two parties will fail. A local grievance can become a recruitment narrative. A battlefield gain can harden bargaining positions. A regional diplomatic shift can trigger retaliation on the ground. Mediation succeeds when these layers are disciplined into one coherent process with sequencing.

Recent diplomacy suggests movement towards greater coherence, but the risk of fragmentation remains high. The African Union, together with the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community, has been co-ordinating a panel of facilitators and engaging regional leaders to consolidate diplomatic efforts around the eastern DR Congo crisis (African Union, 2026). When mediation tracks compete, parties forum-shop. They delay in one track, deny commitments in another and cherry-pick obligations that benefit them.

There is also a strategic bargaining dimension that mediators must confront honestly. In eastern DR Congo, leverage is not only military, but it is also economic and diplomatic. So, what should change from an African mediation and negotiation perspective?

First, unify the process, then protect it. The African Union, East African Community, and Southern African Development Community should sustain a single political track, a single ceasefire and security track, and one verification mechanism, with aligned incentives and consequences. This reduces ambiguity, limits stalling and creates shared expectations.

Second, sequence commitments. Negotiations should begin with enforceable security measures that directly protect civilians. At the same time, a higher-level diplomatic track must address interstate tensions, including allegations of external support and the presence of cross-border armed groups. In parallel, community-level dialogue should operate through local peace committees, women and youth representation, customary leadership engagement and victim-centred mechanisms to address disputes linked institutionally to the formal negotiation tracks.

Third, build compliance into the agreement. A ceasefire must include joint incident-investigation teams, shared incident logs and agreed response procedures. Consequences for violations must be predictable and credible, including diplomatic isolation, targeted restrictions and conditional regional incentives tied to compliance.

Fourth, negotiate the political economy. Sustainable peace must address governance over mining and cross-border trade. This includes traceability systems, transparent licensing, revenue-sharing arrangements for local communities, and joint oversight mechanisms. If economic incentives remain outside the agreement, armed actors will remain embedded within the economy of conflict.

Eastern Congo does not need another headline ceasefire. It needs a disciplined negotiation architecture that reflects the complexity of the conflict, prioritises civilian protection, and makes compliance rational. Mediation is not a meeting. It is a system.



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