

mittee that was appointed by the Afri-

the world's worst humanitarian crisis," the statement read in part.

ing horrific ethnic killings, torture, starvation, sexual violence, and widespread

dominated by manufactured goods, European Union on January 27, 2025.

BY PHILIP WAFULA

KAMPALA. Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have concluded a meeting on economic, governance, immigration, and security.

The meeting was convened at Mpondwe/Kasindi One Stop Border Post (OSBP) under the theme "*Borders as bridges: Harmonising socio-economic activities for shared prosperity and regional security*".

It brought together technical officials of relevant Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) from both countries.

Uganda's Ambassador to the DRC, Mr Farid Kaliisa, and Vice Governor of North Kivu Province Karawa de Ngamo Louis Segond led the meeting, according to a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the meeting, progress was acknowledged in facilitating cross-border trade and promoting peace and security, including the operationalisation of the One Stop Border Post (OSBP) at Mpondwe and strengthened UPDF-FARDC coordination.

"Technical officials were directed to operationalise the Joint Border Operations Committee (JBOC) under OSBP,

conduct regular joint patrols, and integrate customs systems, with the inaugural JBOC meeting scheduled to take place in Uganda by May 2026," the statement reads in part.

The development comes as Uganda and the DRC continue conducting joint military operations, dubbed "Operation Shujaa", launched in November 2021, against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels operating in North Kivu and Ituri provinces.

A July 2024 UN report stated that the Ugandan army and intelligence officials were providing active support to the M23 rebel group, which was active in eastern DRC but was defeated in 2013, and later resumed hostilities since 2021.

The same report also said Uganda was tolerating the group's activities on its territory with supplies and recruits coming through the country. M23's key demands were an end to violence and discrimination against Congolese Tutsi, and a safe return to the DRC for its members.

Uganda denied the claims cited in the UN report, calling them "laughable, baseless and illogical", instead stating that it wants to safeguard its relations with Kinshasa.

Trade volume

Ambassador Kaliisa said the DRC is now the top export destination for Ugandan products in Africa.

Uganda's export portfolio to the DRC is dominated by manufactured goods,

including sugar, steel and iron products, plastics, agricultural commodities, and beverages, cementing the DRC's position as Uganda's premier African export destination.

According to data from the Bank of Uganda, the DRC's imports from Uganda aggregated \$542.74 million (Shs1.94 trillion) in the financial year 2024/2025, representing a notable 29 percent year-on-year increase.

However, when informal trade is factored in, the figure could grow to \$962.2 million (Shs3.43 trillion).

Mr Segond said Uganda serves as a significant source for essential commodities utilised in the eastern DRC, encompassing an array of household essentials, construction materials, agricultural produce, and also serves as a major conduit for DRC's imports and exports.

Ms Florence Kyasiimire, a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, highlighted the importance of the meeting in identifying existing barriers to trade that can easily be addressed by both countries.

Ms Consolée Kahindo Sikakubwa, the DRC delegation and the principal coordinator on finance and economic in the North Kivu Provincial Government, emphasised the meeting's objectives.

These objectives include harmonising joint patrols on shared lakes, cooperation on stamping out illegal trade, addressing non-trade barriers, and increase trade volume and value.

Uganda and the DRC have shared challenges on both lakes, including over-exploitation of fish resources, poverty and policy weaknesses, environmental degradation, and fragile security cooperation, among others.

That highlighted the need for collaborative efforts and effective management strategies.

To promote seamless movement of peoples across the borders, she was urged to expedite the implementation of reciprocal visa waivers for Ugandan nationals, as Uganda had implemented visa waivers for Congolese nationals effective January 2024.

Uganda, DRC hold fresh talks on trade, security

DISCUSSION

During the same meeting, officials welcomed the roadmap of the Lakes Edward and Albert Fisheries and Aquatic Organisation (LEAFAO), which encompasses support for joint sensitisation workshops and modern equipment acquisition to enhance surveillance on the shared waters.