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BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
Central Africa
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Summary

Political Developments

Rwanda: CID Summons Ingabire

Victoire Ingabire, the embattled leader of the yet-to-be registered political party, FDU-Inkingi, was again summoned and interviewed by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) at Police Headquarters in Kacyiru. Ingabire, whose remarks and actions sparked off controversy, is suspected to be answering questions regarding her remarks on genocide which were many considered to be espousing a 'double-genocide' theory, highly provocative and were aimed at rekindling memories of the 1994.

Congo-Kinshasa: Lubanga Defense Heads to Congo for 'Critical Research'

The Thomas Lubanga trial today took a break to allow his attorneys to travel to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to conduct what Judge Adrian Fulford referred to as "critical research". As a result, there will be no hearings until Wednesday March 3, 2010, Judge Fulford announced today, just after the fifth witness called by the defense had completed giving evidence. This witness, and the one before him, testified in closed session hence it was not possible to know what their testimony was about. Both of them testified with extensive protective measures.

Rwanda: Mutaboba to Get RDF Protection

A five-man Rwanda Defense Forces team that has been undergoing training since January 28 will soon be deployed in Guinea Bissau under the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UN-DSS) to offer protection to the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in the country, Ambassador Joseph Mutaboba from Rwanda.

Rwanda: Germans Call for Speedy Trial of FDLR Officials

Sections of the German civil society and politicians want the trial of FDLR leader, Ignace Murwanashyaka and his deputy, Straton Musoni, who were arrested on November 17, 2009, in Germany, to be expedited, a Rwandan diplomat has revealed. "The civil society is putting pressure on them (German Federal Prosecutors) to speed up the trial, but the latter say they want time to do it carefully and gather concrete evidence. Members of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) are accused of masterminding the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, before they fled into eastern DRC. The group has also been blacklisted as a terrorist entity mainly because of the crimes they have committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo for the past 15 years.

Rwanda: Presidential Candidates to Be Announced in July

The Electoral Commission will announce the list of candidates contesting for the forthcoming presidential seat on July 7; Charles Munyaneza, the Executive Secretary of the National Electoral Commission announced. Munyaneza said press conference that this will be preceded by the candidate's registration in an exercise that will run from June 24 to July 2. He told reporters that preparations for the August elections were moving smoothly. Munyaneza said that the final list of voters would be announced on July 23 and the final election results on August 17. The Commission also informed journalists that the number of voters had increased by 9.7 percent having risen from 4.7 million to 5.2. 16,000 polling stations will be set up while 70,000 polling agents are currently undergoing training.

Rwanda: The Media Shouldn't Give Scour to Ingabire's Revisionist Rhetoric

Last month, Victoire Ingabire earned herself the most vicious distinction for being the first and only person to publicly espouse a revisionist and Genocide denial position, in relation to the Genocide against the Tutsi, on the Rwandan territory. Indeed the kind of extremist rhetoric she has been articulating in the last month is nothing new to the Rwandan public. The difference here is that Ingabire is rubbing salt in the wounds of the Genocide survivors, right at the scene of the crime. On her arrival in Kigali after 16 years of self-imposed exile, the top item on her agenda was an immediate visit to the Gisozi Genocide Memorial Site where, standing on the graves of the victims - 250,000 of them - Victoire Ingabire went on to tell the world that there were two Genocides in Rwanda. Victoire Ingabire's name features prominently on United Nation's list among the top leaders and active fund-raisers of the FDLR, an organization included on the State Department's list of terrorist groups. For those granting Victoire Ingabire the platform and media channels to articulate her views, her recent interview with The East African where she doesn't mince her words about her unwavering commitment to her Genocide ideology, should serve as a wakeup call demonstrating that to certain Rwandan politicians, Genocide is an unfinished business.

Rwanda: Intimidation of opposition parties must end

Amnesty International

PRESS RELEASE

Amnesty International has strongly condemned a worrying attack on a Rwandan opposition group as the country prepares for presidential elections in August 2010. In a letter to Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Amnesty International urged him to use the elections as an opportunity to show the government's commitment to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. The letter was prompted by a recent attack on two members of United Democratic Forces and harassment of the President of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda (DGPR). On 3 February, Victoire Ingabire, president of the FDU-Inkingi, and her aide Joseph Ntawangundi were attacked in the capital Kigali while collecting documents needed for the party's registration from a government building.

Rwanda: 'I Do Not Waver On My Genocide Ideology' - Ingabire

Her latest interview in The East African truly revealed that she is afflicted by the worst case of megalomania and, unfortunately, there is no remedy in sight. In this week's issue of The East African, her interviewers claim that "She is now fighting to get a national identity card so that she can participate in the election as a legitimate candidate". She is emboldened possibly because she is used to dealing with ignorant or biased media, as she seeks to cleanse the bloody hands of the FDLR that has evolved from her own RDR, and ALIR, who have terrorized the region for the last 15 years. Ingabire says, "We shall do everything in our power to normalize relations with the Democratic Republic of Congo". She is quoted in The East African as saying; "The genocide took place 16 years ago and now is the time for democracy", she shamelessly tells The East African. Basically, her message is: "who cares about the Genocide that happened 16 years ago?"

Rwanda: Diplomats to Stamp Out 'Communication Flaws'

Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo has demanded that the ongoing two-day retreat with the country's diplomats come up with a solution to what she described as annoying communication flaws' between Rwandan foreign missions and the ministry. She made the call while opening a two-day retreat in Kigali between the ministry and Rwandan Ambassadors and High Commissioners. She states, "My personal demands are very simple; I know we will come up with a number of things, but one of the most critical things I would like us to discuss fully and come up with is a solution on setting up a mechanism of fast and effective communication between the embassies and the ministry,".

Rwanda: RDF Receives Weapons Destroyer Machine

The Rwanda Defense Forces RDF today officially received a JMC 4000 weapons destroyer, a machine that will be used by the RDF to destroy illicit small arms. The UK Defense Attaché, Lt. Col. Simon Etherington, officially handed over the equipment to Lt. Col. Innocent Kabandana, Head of Logistics, at Kanombe Military barracks. This he said will contribute to the enhancement of peace and security in the Great Lakes Region.

Rwanda: Mushikiwabo Emphasizes Business Diplomacy

Minister of Foreign Affairs Louise Mushikiwabo has called upon Rwanda diplomats to put more effort in marketing the country as a potential business destination in addition to the traditional diplomatic roles. Speaking at the opening of the annual Ambassadors' retreat at the ministry headquarters, Rwanda's top diplomat said that the country is opening a new chapter in its diplomacy. Mushikiwabo states, "Our diplomacy is moving very rapidly from the traditional good relations approach, political approach to a much more business oriented diplomacy," She cited the example of the rejuvenated diplomatic relations with the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Economic Developments

East Africa: Kagame Receives EA Business Council

The East African Business Council (EABC) wants full involvement of the business community in all policy formulation and decisions that have an effect on business. They said this shortly after meeting with President Paul Kagame at Urugwiro Village. The EABC, which is an apex body made up of private sector associations from all five member states, says that total inclusion of the business community in policy formulation and implementation would improve investor confidence. The body says that frequent policy changes by regional governments, without due consultation with the relevant stakeholders negatively impacts on existing investments and also deters new investors.

Rwanda: More Concrete Action Needed on AG's Report

The Auditor General's (AG) report that was released mid this week, revealed very many loopholes within the Government financial procedures. With over Rwf 4.3 billion unaccounted for, need to take immediate action to close up these gaps that are causing great financial losses to Rwandans. And, now that the report has been released, both prosecution and parliament should follow up and make sure that those responsible for causing financial loss to the Government are brought to book. There should also be an effort to recover as much money as possible from those found guilty of embezzling public funds.

Rwanda: Climbing Beans Improving Rwandan Agriculture

Rwandan farmers have adopted new varieties of climbing beans to replace bush beans, recognizing the climbing beans' potential to supply a greater amount of food and income. Improvements have been made to climbing beans to make them more adaptable to harsh climates, and on 15 January, the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) released eight different climbing bean varieties to farmers.

Social Developments

Rwanda: National Watchdog Slams HRW Report

The National Human Rights Commission (NHCR) has dismissed a report recently published by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in which the organization claims that the government's policy on land may lead to increased poverty amongst the population. In the report, HRW suggests that the programs leaves farmers at risk of food insecurity and may lead to increased poverty.

Rwanda to host World Environment Day celebrations – UN agency

UN NEWS SERVICE

Rwanda will play global host to celebrations for the 2010 World Environment Day, observed annually on 5 June, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced. UNEP selected the Rwandan capital of Kigali as the epicenter for this year's festivities because of its

environmental richness, including rare and economically-important species such as the mountain gorilla, as well as its pioneering transition to a ‘green’ economy. The theme of this year’s Day will be “Many Species. One Planet. One Future.”

Refugees flood Congo-Brazzaville

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Congo-Brazzaville has said it is expecting more displaced people to transfer in from the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. The UNHCR said that more than 120,000 refugees are already crammed into camps in Congo-Brazzaville and Central African Republic. They escaped ethnic fighting in the region and have been placed into 90 sites along a 500km stretch of the river Ubangi - the natural border between the two Congos. DR Congo's massive mineral wealth has drawn in neighboring countries into the conflict, exacerbating the refugee crisis. According to the New York-based Human Rights Watch, more than 1,400 civilians have been murdered this year by both Congolese troops and rebels, sparking Africa's worst refugee crisis.

Central African Republic: Tackling Impunity Key Challenge for Country, Says UN Rights Chief

Addressing impunity for human rights violations is one of the top challenges facing the Central African Republic (CAR), as it enters the final stretch before elections. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, who is on a one-day visit to the nation, told reporters in the capital, Bangui, that the election scheduled for 18 April "presents a tremendous opportunity for the Central African Republic, both to show the world and the people of the Central African Republic that it can hold successful, free and fair elections, and to take a great leap forward towards securing a peaceful democratic future." CAR is one of the world's poorest and most neglected countries, ranking 179 out of 182 countries in the 2009 Human Development Report compiled by the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The High Commissioner noted that the nation is beset by problems on both the domestic and international fronts, including banditry and the activity of armed groups in the northern Vakaga region, as well as the presence of the "particularly vicious" Ugandan rebel group known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which operates in eastern CAR.

Religious leaders, football stars and actors back ‘Candles for Rwanda’ initiative as Rwanda marks anniversary of end of 1994 genocide

The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams, Chelsea striker Didier Drogba and Hollywood star Danny Glover are among the latest public figures to light candles on camera as part of ‘Candles for Rwanda’, a global initiative to mark the 15th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide and help destitute survivors who are still suffering from its consequences 15 years on.

Children still recruited into DRC's war ranks

Afrol News,

Youngsters are still being recruited within the ranks of both the rebels and the national army, despite efforts to end the use of child soldiers in the war-torn east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with girls at particular risk of becoming sex slaves and less likely to be released, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has said. "Used as combatants, labor and sex slaves, victims of months-long violence and rape, girls are all too rarely freed by the armed forces and groups," UNICEF said in a news release in Goma, eastern DRC, marking the International Day against the use of Child Soldiers, noting that only 20 percent of freed children under the agency's care were girls. Since 2004 more than 36,000 children in the DRC have been rescued from armed forces and groups, mostly in the east. In 2000, nearly 6,000 youngsters were freed, but only 1,222 of these were girls.

Details

Political Developments

Rwanda: CID Summons Ingabire

The New Times

Kigali — Victoire Ingabire, the embattled leader of the yet-to-be registered political party, FDU-Inkingi, was yesterday again summoned and interviewed by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) at Police Headquarters in Kacyiru.

Ingabire, whose remarks and actions sparked off controversy, is suspected to be answering questions regarding her remarks on genocide which were many considered to be espousing a 'double-genocide' theory, highly provocative and were aimed at rekindling memories of the 1994.

In an interview with The New Times, Police Spokesperson Supt. Eric Kayiranga confirmed the development but could not reveal the exact reasons behind Ingabire's summoning.

"She came to assist in investigations that have been going on. We can't reveal what is contained in the dossier today as investigations are still ongoing," Kayiranga said.

Ingabire was again accompanied to the police headquarters by her lawyer, Protais Mutembe.

Congo-Kinshasa: Lubanga Defense Heads To Congo for 'Critical Research'

Lubanga Trial Website (The Hague)

The Thomas Lubanga trial today took a break to allow his attorneys to travel to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to conduct what Judge Adrian Fulford referred to as "critical research".

As a result, there will be no hearings until Wednesday March 3, 2010, Judge Fulford announced today, just after the fifth witness called by the defense had completed giving evidence. This witness, and the one before him, testified in closed session hence it was not possible to know what their testimony was about. Both of them testified with extensive protective measures.

Today, Judge Fulford directed the defense team and representatives of the Victims and Witnesses Unit (VWU) to meet and resolve an outstanding issue which he said related to research which the defense wished to carry out during their visit to the DRC next week.

Mr. Lubanga is being tried at the International Criminal Court (ICC) with the war crimes of enlisting, conscripting and using child soldiers in armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo during 2002 and 2003.

He has denied the charges, and his defense has said it will prove to court that prosecution witnesses were coached, and that those who testified as former child soldiers actually never were. The ICC alleges that Mr. Lubanga headed the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) and was commander-in-chief of UPC's armed wing which used child soldiers.

Since the defense case started on January 27, 2010, five witnesses have been called. The first three witnesses testified that intermediaries of the Office of The Prosecutor (ICC) bribed and duped some boys and their parents or guardians into joining the alleged scheme to fabricate evidence.

Rwanda: Mutaboba to Get RDF Protection

The New Times

Kigali — A five-man Rwanda Defense Forces team that has been undergoing training since January 28 will soon be deployed in Guinea Bissau under the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UN-DSS) to offer protection to the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in the country, Ambassador Joseph Mutaboba from Rwanda.

The development was revealed by the defense and RDF spokesman, Maj. Jill Rutaremara, in an interview with The New Times yesterday.

Rutaremara, said that a team of 11 was trained by United Nations Department of Safety and Security after fulfilling the UN assessment criteria.

"The five were selected from six candidates and will soon be deployed as close protection personnel for Ambassador Mutaboba,"

He said that their training which started on Jan 28 and successfully concluded on Thursday was conducted by a UN Team.

"This is usually done by the UN and they can even deploy them elsewhere. They are supposed to serve for twelve months on a rotational basis and this means that they will be replaced by another team after their tour of duty."

Rwanda: Germans Call for Speedy Trial of FDLR Officials

The New Times

Kigali — Sections of the German civil society and politicians want the trial of FDLR leader, Ignace Murwanashyaka and his deputy, Straton Musoni, who were arrested on November 17, 2009, in Germany, to be expedited, a Rwandan diplomat has revealed.

Ambassador Christine Nkulikiyinka, Rwanda's envoy to Germany, revealed this to The New Times during the just concluded two-day retreat of Rwandan heads of diplomatic missions.

"The civil society is putting pressure on them (German Federal Prosecutors) to speed up the trial, but the latter say they want time to do it carefully and gather concrete evidence," Nkulikiyinka told The New Times.

Members of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) are accused of masterminding the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, before they fled into eastern DRC.

The group has also been blacklisted as a terrorist entity mainly because of the crimes they have committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo for the past 15 years.

Murwanashyaka and Musoni were arrested on a warrant issued by German Federal Prosecutors who had confirmed that the two fugitives were leaders of a "terrorist group (FDLR) that is accused of crimes against humanity and different war crimes" in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Pointing to 'systematic crimes' against the civilian population, German prosecutors last year acknowledged that the two led a para-military organization (FDLR) active in the DRC civil war and which "has killed hundreds of Congolese, raped women and recruited child soldiers."

However, Nkulikiyinka conceded that not all Germans know or understand the FDLR problem.

"I would be lying if I said that all Germans know, but those who follow Rwandan issues or have an interest on Congo (DRC) know what role the FDLR has done and are the ones who push, even some politicians, so that the problem can be solved," the envoy said.

Without giving specific names, she noted that Germany has 'a genocide history' and as such also "has some committed politicians who would like to see the issue resolved."

"It is a burden on them when they hear that they have such people in their country."

In June 2002, Germany introduced a new International Penal Code to deal with the crime of genocide and other crimes against humanity and terrorism.

Under this law, German prosecutors can try a civilian for command responsibility over atrocities committed outside Germany.

Rwanda: Presidential Candidates to Be Announced in July

The New Times

Kigali — The Electoral Commission will announce the list of candidates contesting for the forthcoming presidential seat on July 7; Charles Munyaneza, the Executive Secretary of the National Electoral Commission announced yesterday.

Munyaneza said press conference that this will be preceded by the candidate's registration in an exercise that will run from June 24 to July 2.

He told reporters that preparations for the August elections were moving smoothly.

"We have a schedule that we are following and we are doing everything according to plan. We are currently working on the list of voters and from March 3 to March 21, we will send the lists to the local levels for further verification," he said

Munyaneza said that the final list of voters would be announced on July 23 and the final election results on August 17.

He added that the projected budget is Rwf 6 billion, which has more than doubled compared to Rwf 2.3bn used in 2003.

He said that the government has so far raised some of the amount and is planning to release more funds from the 2010/11 budget.

"We have so far managed to get 60 percent of the budget and we are pretty sure the rest will also come in the next few months," Munyaneza said

Journalists raised the credibility of Chrysologue Karangwa who heads the Commission questioning whether his affiliation with the ruling party; RPF would not cloud his judgment during the elections.

"That's an interesting question, but maybe we will have to look for a foreigner to run this Commission because even after me, there will be someone else and he or she will also belong to a political party," Karangwa, who was present suggested

Karangwa explained that the issue of political party affiliation was not important as long as the person in the office stuck to principles.

The Commission also informed journalists that the number of voters had increased by 9.7 percent having risen from 4.7 million to 5.2.

16,000 polling stations will be set up while 70,000 polling agents are currently undergoing training.

Rwanda: The Media Shouldn't Give Scour to Ingabire's Revisionist Rhetoric

The New Times

Kigali — Last month, Victoire Ingabire earned herself the most vicious distinction for being the first and only person to publicly espouse a revisionist and Genocide denial position, in relation to the Genocide against the Tutsi, on the Rwandan territory.

Indeed the kind of extremist rhetoric she has been articulating in the last month is nothing new to the Rwandan public. The difference here is that Ingabire is rubbing salt in the wounds of the Genocide survivors, right at the scene of the crime.

On her arrival in Kigali after 16 years of self-imposed exile, the top item on her agenda was an immediate visit to the Gisozi Genocide Memorial Site where, standing on the graves of the victims - 250,000 of them - Victoire Ingabire went on to tell the world that there were two Genocides in Rwanda.

Diabolic as it is, make no mistake about, Ingabire has a fringe constituency, mainly in Europe and North America who subscribe to her revisionist line. However, before Ingabire did it at Gisozi, the revisionist forces had never had a voice in Rwanda or the East African region for that matter.

For the editorial management of a respectable regional publication - The East African - to choose to give space to a known revisionist and Genocide denier, simply boggles the mind. Indeed the newspaper could easily label our observations as sentimental or even emotional. Tell that to the United Nations.

Ingabire's dossier is much deeper than the editors at Nation Media Group think. Her membership and active role in the upper echelons of FDLR are well documented.

Victoire Ingabire's name features prominently on United Nation's list among the top leaders and active fund-raisers of the FDLR, an organization included on the State Department's list of terrorist groups.

It was only this week that a senior United States legislator recommended the publishing of the names of all FDLR leaders.

Senator Richard Durbin from Illinois, Deputy Senate Majority leader, made the declaration on his visit to Goma in North Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Victoire Ingabire is already listed and has been exposed, as member of a terrorist organization FDLR, by none other than the United Nations itself. The question is: Why should a regional publication seek to give succor to such an individual?

The objectives and outcomes of the ideology that FDLR and Ingabire represent are not a remote concept. The Rwandan people, who were at the receiving end some sixteen years ago, still remember as if it happened yesterday.

Indeed, having declared "I do not waver on my genocide ideology" some readers gave her the benefit of the doubt, believing that maybe the quote was an error that Ms Ingabire would rectify.

It's now coming to a week and we haven't heard any correction to that effect. Clearly, Ingabire knew what she was talking about and she shouldn't be second-guessed.

Reports that Ingabire's interview with The East African was masterminded by some intelligence organizations within the region, with a long history of using journalists as agents and assets, if true, do not augur well for regional stability.

Apart from re-affirming what she describes as her "genocide ideology", the interview was a joke calculated to introduce Victoire Ingabire to The East African readers.

Her tirades against such national institutions and programmes as Gacaca, unity and reconciliation, as well as gender equality cannot be dignified with a comment, given the fact that they have been recognized the world over, for the critical role they have played in the recovery and subsequent development of the country.

Victoire Ingabire is an individual frozen in time. Ever since she was initiated into the Parmehutu mindset and view society, which evolved into the Genocide ideology in Rwanda, her view of the world has remained static.

Her ideological roots are often betrayed by the kind of language that has characterized her declarations and news releases.

Since her return last month, Ingabire has been communicating to the public through inciting but coded messages, the same language that characterized the founders of the Genocide ideology in Rwanda, including Dominique Mbonyumutwa, one of her ideological ancestors and extremist politician whose grave Ingabire visited to pay homage, soon after she arrived in the country.

And her statements in English and French, vicious as they are, sound much more sanitized compared to her Kinyarwanda versions which are designed to incite the Rwandan public.

For those granting Victoire Ingabire the platform and media channels to articulate her views, her recent interview with The East African where she doesn't mince her words about her unwavering commitment to her Genocide ideology, should serve as a wakeup call demonstrating that to certain Rwandan politicians, Genocide is an unfinished business.

Rwanda: Intimidation of opposition parties must end

Amnesty International

PRESS RELEASE

Amnesty International has strongly condemned a worrying attack on a Rwandan opposition group as the country prepares for presidential elections in August 2010.

In a letter to Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Amnesty International urged him to use the elections as an opportunity to show the government's commitment to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

“Past elections have been marred by intimidation, however this year's vote gives Rwanda the chance to promote rights not repression,” said Amnesty International's Africa Programme Deputy Director Tawanda Hondora.

The letter was prompted by a recent attack on two members of United Democratic Forces (Forces Démocratiques Unifiées, FDU-Inkingi) and harassment of the President of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda (Parti Démocratique Vert du Rwanda, DGPR).

“Amnesty International is concerned that these recent incidents are part of a wider pattern of intimidation and harassment to discourage and discredit opposition groups,” said Tawanda Hondora.

On 3 February, Victoire Ingabire, president of the FDU-Inkingi, and her aide Joseph Ntawangundi were attacked in the capital Kigali while collecting documents needed for the party's registration from a government building.

During the attack Victoire Ingabire's passport was stolen and Ntawangundi was severely beaten.

Amnesty International welcomes the police enquiry into the incident. However, Police Spokesman Eric Kayiranga confirmed, as of 15 February, that no charges were pressed and some of those arrested had been released.

“Opening an investigation is a good first step,” said Tawanda Hondora, “but an effective investigation must be prompt, impartial and bring those responsible for the attack to justice.”

Three days after the incident, the New Times alleged that Ntawangundi had been convicted of genocide in absentia in 2007 by a gacaca court – a community tribunal set up to try genocide cases. He was arrested the same day, 6 February, on charges of involvement in the 1994 genocide, which left as many as 800,000 ethnic Tutsi and moderate Hutu dead.

A law criminalizing “genocidal ideology,” whose terms are vague and ambiguous, was promulgated on 1 October 2008, unduly stifling freedom of expression. The offence is punishable by 10 to 25 years' imprisonment.

Victoire Ingabire, has regularly been denounced in media close to the government as being “negationist” of the genocide or “divisionist” for public remarks made since her return from exile in January 2010 calling for the prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against Hutu by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

The leader of the Ideal Social Party (PS-Imberakuri, PSI), Bernard Ntaganda, was also called before the Rwandan Senate to answer accusations of genocide ideology in late 2009.

“Rwanda has an obligation to prohibit speech that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence” said Tawanda Hondora, “but Rwanda’s laws on genocide ideology too often conflate legitimate political dissent with such incitement.”

Frank Habineza, the President of the Green Party, has also reported being threatened by a man he suspects to be a security agent on 4 February in a hotel in Kigali, the capital.

Habineza reported the incident to the police on 5 February and is awaiting further information on the status of investigations.

Amnesty International calls on the Rwandan government to investigate the intimidation of opposition groups, bring those responsible to justice and take immediate steps to respect the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly of opposition parties.

Rwanda: 'I Do Not Waver On My Genocide Ideology' - Ingabire

The New Times

Kigali — As she continues to articulate her genocide denial, Victoire Ingabire Umuhoro, is increasingly coming out in the open as truly the revisionist demagogue that she is.

Her latest interview in The East African truly revealed that she is afflicted by the worst case of megalomania and, unfortunately, there is no remedy in sight.

Recently, when Ingabire tried to push her weight around at Kinyinya Sector by attempting to arrogantly jump a queue expecting preferential treatment, she caused a fracas but in which she went away unscathed; That was the cue for her comedy to begin.

When she was interviewed by the BBC, she confirmed that no one laid a finger on her, only that her handbag which contained her newly acquired Rwandan ID and passport had been snatched, but were later recovered by police which also went along and arrested five people involved in the brawl.

That is when she realised that she had let slip a golden opportunity to play the victimisation card; but she could always catch up.

Soon she was telling anyone willing to listen that she had fallen into a well-planned ambush where she and her assistant were lynched! (Interestingly her assistant was arrested a few days later on a pending Gacaca arrest warrant for Genocide)... talk of bad company.

Every statement she made on the incident contradicted the previous one, and it became comical, if not cynical, as international media outdid themselves in airing and publishing her patchwork of delusional fabrications.

In this week's issue of The East African, her interviewers claim that "She is now fighting to get a national identity card so that she can participate in the election as a legitimate candidate".

If the journalists had bothered to do some research, they would have found out that their "scoop" was sitting right there with her ID, given to her in record time.

When she says; "I will ensure that there are more women in power", is she of this world? Which country has more women representation?

Rwanda's women participation at all levels of national institutions is a matter of world record,

Her obsession and resentment against successful Made-in- Rwanda solutions such as GACACA and national reconciliation programs that have been lauded worldwide, is simply motivated by her politics of hate.

Of course Gacaca is personal for having had the audacity to sentence her own mother, Theresa Dusabe, twice in two separate trials receiving 30 and life sentences respectively.

Ingabire's abhorrence for Gacaca and why she has pledged to do away with it once in power, is understandable.

She is emboldened possibly because she is used to dealing with ignorant or biased media, as she seeks to cleanse the bloody hands of the FDLR that has evolved from her own RDR, and ALIR, who have terrorized the region for the last 15 years.

"We shall do everything in our power to normalize relations with the Democratic Republic of Congo", Ingabire says.

Evidently, she has a point as far as this item on her wish-list is concerned since the FDLR which she supports and has been fundraising for, is currently the subject of military operations by the DRC army (FARDC) and MONUC.

"The FDLR claims to be fighting for peace... Our argument is political space - it would solve the problem", Ingabire tells the paper. Will it also bring to life the millions of innocent men women and children who perished?

In what should be her parting shot, she is quoted in The East African as saying;

"The genocide took place 16 years ago and now is the time for democracy", she shamelessly tells The East African. Basically, her message is: "who cares about the Genocide that happened 16 years ago?"

It is time to start where we left to complete the unfinished business". And get this: Ingabire tells The East African, "I do not waver on my genocide ideology". Talk of unfinished business.

Rwanda: Diplomats to Stamp Out 'Communication Flaws'

The New Times

Kigali — Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo has demanded that the ongoing two-day retreat with the country's diplomats come up with a solution to what she described as annoying communication flaws' between Rwandan foreign missions and the ministry.

She made the call yesterday while opening a two-day retreat in Kigali between the ministry and Rwandan Ambassadors and High Commissioners.

"My personal demands are very simple; I know we will come up with a number of things, but one of the most critical things I would like us to discuss fully and come up with is a solution on setting up a mechanism of fast and effective communication between the embassies and the ministry," she noted.

Mushikiwabo told the diplomats that in the less than two months she has been at Minaffet, she has realized that this issue was a major challenge, one that must be overcome because it affects the whole team's effectiveness.

"It is my sincere hope that by the time you go back, we would have agreed on how to set up a mechanism of fast and flawless communication."

The minister urged the meeting not only to come up with the mechanism, but also identify who will monitor it once in place, saying that this communication should not stop at the minister, but also other people within the ministry.

Mushikiwabo also urged the meeting to find a solution to the health insurance of employees at the country's embassies who are getting problems with the current insurance company covering them.

Rwandan diplomats are covered by Allianz Worldwide Care, a provider of international health insurance but some of them are being required by Allianz to meet their health costs and be reimbursed later.

"The other deliverable for this retreat, in my opinion, should be removing the bottlenecks to some of the administrative issues, starting with the issue of the health insurance."

Rwanda: RDF Receives Weapons Destroyer Machine

The New Times

Kigali — The Rwanda Defense Forces [RDF] today officially received a JMC 4000 weapons destroyer, a machine that will be used by the RDF to destroy illicit small arms.

The UK Defense Attaché, Lt. Col. Simon Etherington, officially handed over the equipment to Lt. Col. Innocent Kabandana, Head of Logistics [J4], at Kanombe Military barracks.

Kabandana who represented the RDF, commended the UK Government for the support. He noted that the machine had enabled the RDF to destroy over 34,000 illicit arms.

This he said will contribute to the enhancement of peace and security in the Great Lakes Region.

He added that many RDF personnel and the National Police are now equipped with skills to operate the Weapons Destroyer thanks to the training offered by members of the British Army.

Other RDF officers that were present at the ceremony include Major Gatete Karuranga, Commanding Officer of Maintenance Battalion, Major Vianney Cuba, Commanding Officer of Transport Battalion and ACP Vianney Nshimiyimana, National Coordinator for Small Arms Management.

The machine has the capacity to destroy up to 50 pistols per hour.

Rwanda: Mushikiwabo Emphasizes Business Diplomacy

The New Times

Kigali — Minister of Foreign Affairs Louise Mushikiwabo has called upon Rwanda diplomats to put more effort in marketing the country as a potential business destination in addition to the traditional diplomatic roles.

Speaking at the opening of the annual Ambassadors' retreat at the ministry headquarters yesterday, Rwanda's top diplomat said that the country is opening a new chapter in its diplomacy.

"Our diplomacy is moving very rapidly from the traditional good relations approach, political approach to a much more business oriented diplomacy," Mushikiwabo said.

She cited the example of the rejuvenated diplomatic relations with the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

"Even as we pursue more security and peace in the region, we (Rwanda and DRC) have embarked on purely economic activities of common interest."

"And we are confident that these projects are going to bring about the kind of standard of living and understanding that the peoples of the two countries need," she noted.

On the reinstated relations between Rwanda and France, Mushikiwabo noted that though it came as a surprise to some people, the process of normalizing ties between the two countries was on-going for some time.

Mushikiwabo told the diplomats that it has been noticed, from some French media, that Sarkozy is taking some heat and criticism for deciding to come to Rwanda.

"There is a level of disappointment by some circles in France who have never thought it was worth trying to mend fences with Rwanda. I think there is a sense of commitment from him as he is taking domestic heat for coming to this country."

Mushikiwabo said that Sarkozy's visit is important and is going to signal "what we do from here - normalization is only beginning."

Economic Developments

East Africa: Kagame Receives EA Business Council

The New Times

Kigali — The East African Business Council (EABC) wants full involvement of the business community in all policy formulation and decisions that have an effect on business.

They said this shortly after meeting with President Paul Kagame at Urugwiro Village.

The EABC, which is an apex body made up of private sector associations from all five member states, says that total inclusion of the business community in policy formulation and implementation would improve investor confidence.

The body says that frequent policy changes by regional governments, without due consultation with the relevant stakeholders negatively impacts on existing investments and also deters new investors.

"We have issues of the persistent non-tariff barriers that don't seem to be reducing, infrastructure projects that need to be addressed, and the relevancy of EABC in generating policy and in being consulted when certain policies are being discussed," the Chairman of the EABC, Faustin Kananura Mbundu, said yesterday.

Rwanda's Minister for East African Affairs, Monique Mukaruriza, said that President Kagame promised his support to the EABC.

"He recognized the key role the EABC will play in the growth of the economies of the EAC states," She said.

Mukaruriza added that Rwanda has a participatory approach when it comes to formulating policies.

The EABC call comes at a time the World Bank Doing Business Report says that transport costs as a share of exports, for a country like Rwanda, is estimated at 48 percent, something that raises the cost of production.

In relation to power, the price of electricity/production in East Africa is said to be 5-10 times higher than the region's competitors like Egypt and South Africa.

"EAC has low quality power supply system, with a high dependency on large scale hydroelectricity plants leading to power rationing as a result of dry spells and erratic rainfalls," Mbundu said.

The EABC gave President Kagame a brief that contains issues affecting the private sector in the EAC. The same memorandum will be given to other EAC Heads of State before the EAC Heads of State summit scheduled for March.

"The memorandum we have given to the President is the same we gave to the Chairman of the EAC Heads of State Summit, Jakaya Kikweta," Mbundu said.

Rwanda: More Concrete Action Needed on AG's Report

THE NEW TIMES

EDITORIAL

Kigali — The Auditor General's (AG) report that was released mid this week, revealed very many loopholes within the Government financial procedures.

With over Rwf 4.3 billion unaccounted for, we need to take immediate action to close up these gaps that are causing great financial losses to Rwandans.

As a country that has zero tolerance to corruption, all concerned institutions that have within their mandate curbing corruption should take this report seriously, dissect it and come up with deterrent measures that would reduce the loss of taxpayers' money.

And, now that the report has been released, both prosecution and parliament should follow up and make sure that those responsible for causing financial loss to the Government are brought to book.

There should also be an effort to recover as much money as possible from those found guilty of embezzling public funds.

The report highlighted cases of bonuses that were paid out to staff without the necessary approval, or unauthorized salary advances and loans, not to mention excess allowances like telephone and transport. Such are examples of cases that can be avoided if jobs are respected and institutions strictly follow their procedure manuals.

Now that the report is out in the open, no more time should be wasted. Mechanisms should be set up to monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the Auditor General as we together strive towards a corrupt-free Rwanda.

Rwanda: Climbing Beans Improving Rwandan Agriculture

Media Global (New York)

Rwandan farmers have adopted new varieties of climbing beans to replace bush beans, recognizing the climbing beans' potential to supply a greater amount of food and income.

Improvements have been made to climbing beans to make them more adaptable to harsh climates, and on 15 January, the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) released eight different climbing bean varieties to farmers, CIAT's Principle Researcher Louise Sperling told MediaGlobal.

The climbing beans grow vertically instead of spreading out which helps farmers with limited space for planting. "Climbing beans are...wonderful for those with little land," said Sperling. A farmer can produce three to four tons per hectare (ha) in contrast to only one ton that bush beans may yield. This is important to Rwandan farmers that on average have 0.7 hectares of land to feed a household of seven or eight people, explained Sperling.

"Climbing beans have a three-to-one yield advantage compared to bush bean varieties," Paul Kimani, regional bean breeder and professor at the University of Nairobi, told MediaGlobal. This is crucial to Rwandan farmers because of diminishing land sizes and a growing population said Kimani.

"Current figures show at least 65 percent of Rwandan farmers growing beans," said Sperling. The adoption of the climbing beans has meant an additional income of \$20 million for Rwandan farmers. "The rate of adoption has been impressive," Sperling continued. "The economic benefits of these beans has [sic] recently lead Rwandan authorities to praise them and promote them."

"Climbing beans can be grown easily even in tiny urban plots [and the] leaves are edible and rich not only in protein but also minerals, particularly iron and zinc," said Kimani. With growing population pressure, the climbing beans help in meeting food security needs. "Beans are now considered a health crop because they are cholesterol free; beans are rich in dietary fiber and [have] been shown to have positive benefits for people with HIV, cancer, and obesity," said Kimani. Other benefits of the new bean varieties include improved nutrition and larger revenues for farmers.

The first improved climbing beans were introduced in Rwanda in the mid-1980s and were quickly adopted by farmers, but an outbreak of root disease destroyed most of the crop by the late 1990s, explained Kimani. The root disease led many farmers to abandon the climbing beans. A new regional program began in 2000 to develop a new generation of climbing beans that were disease resistance, and the new breeding process lead to the development of the new climbing beans in Rwanda. "People who stopped growing beans due to disease...can grow them again," Kimani said.

CIAT works to provide farmers with many new climbing bean varieties and they have gained support from many other organizations, including the Swiss Development Corporation, Canadian

Agency for International Development, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and national governments.

"[The] new varieties [are] adapted to marginal areas where heat stress and high humidity are a major challenge," said Kimani. "They are doing very well not only in Rwanda but also in Kenya, Cameroon, lower humid zones of western Congo, and many other regions which were previously considered not suitable for beans," explained Kimani. As Sperling explained, the new climbing beans are more heat tolerant and are better at lower elevations and areas affected by droughts.

Sperling also noted that the new beans' success is contagious. "The high excitement in Rwanda is spreading climbing [beans] to other neighboring regions: south west Uganda, Burundi, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and Kenya." She calls the new beans a winner technology, because they are productive, good for places with scarce land, fill the stomach, and increasingly "fill the purse."

Social Developments

Rwanda: National Watchdog Slams HRW Report

The New Times

Kigali — The National Human Rights Commission (NHCR) has dismissed a report recently published by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in which the organization claims that the government's policy on land may lead to increased poverty amongst the population.

Speaking to the press after meeting the rights body's country representative, Carina Tertsakian, the commission's chairperson, Zainab Kayitesi, said that on the contrary, the strategy which emphasizes land consolidation has enabled the population to realize high crop yields.

"We informed her that the policy has instead led to increased food production and reduced poverty unlike before where everyone with a half a hectare or small pieces of land would plant whatever they wanted," she said.

In the report, HRW suggests that the programs leaves farmers at risk of food insecurity and may lead to increased poverty.

Kayitesi castigated the group for not having consulted with her commission before publishing the report.

"It's always proper to consult us. We usually cooperate with both local and international human rights organizations and it is along those lines that they should have asked us to share information with them," she added.

Commissioner Laurent Nkongoli criticized claims in the report that the new media law imposes restrictions on gathering and reporting information, and that it maintains defamation as a criminal offense.

"When it comes to rights, there are those that cannot be denied like the right to life. But there are others that are regulated by the law which requires that they be exercised lawfully without violating other people's rights," he said.

In her remarks, Tertsakian said that although there have been some challenges, the local judicial system Gacaca has dealt with tens of thousands of cases.

She compared the courts to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) which she said has been slow in handling its trial cases.

Rwanda to host World Environment Day celebrations – UN agency

UN NEWS SERVICE

17 February 2010 – Rwanda will play global host to celebrations for the 2010 World Environment Day, observed annually on 5 June, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced today.

UNEP selected the Rwandan capital of Kigali as the epicenter for this year's festivities because of its environmental richness, including rare and economically-important species such as the mountain gorilla, as well as its pioneering transition to a 'green' economy. The theme of this year's Day will be "Many Species. One Planet. One Future."

"Rwanda is an African nation that, despite big challenges, is seizing the multiple opportunities possible from green economic policies," said UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

The East African country, known as the "land of a thousand hills," is turning to some innovative environmental strategies, such as a ban on plastic bags, ecological clean up campaigns, a conservation corridor for chimpanzees, and the development of renewable energies such as solar power and biogas generation, noted UNEP.

"The pairing of Rwanda with World Environment Day in 2010 is thus a compelling and inspiring alliance, underlining that all economies, rich and poor and North and South, have real and tangible opportunities to shape a more sustainable development path," stressed Mr. Steiner.

"One that develops new business models based on intelligent management of the natural world and high tech clean and renewable businesses," he continued.

UNEP said this year's celebrations are slated to be bigger than ever before, building on the unprecedented success of 2009 when people in more than 80 countries registered activities on its World Environment Day website and more than 10,000 people joined the "twitter for trees" campaign.

In a related development, UNEP today [announced](#) a series of green measures for October's Commonwealth Games in Delhi, India, from boosting energy efficiency and air quality to expanding the city's forests.

"The Commonwealth Games, like the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, represent an inordinate opportunity to pilot innovative ideas and transformational policies able to deliver a low-carbon, resource efficient green economy," said Mr. Steiner.

"The potential positive impact for Delhi's 14 million inhabitants is matched by the environmental awareness generated across the world," he added. "UNEP is delighted to be working with the Commonwealth Games for the first time ever and we look forward to a positive environmental legacy for the residents of this historic capital city."

Refugees flood Congo-Brazzaville

Al Jazeera

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Congo-Brazzaville has said it is expecting more displaced people to pour in from the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo.

The UNHCR said that more than 120,000 refugees are already crammed into camps in Congo-Brazzaville and Central African Republic.

They escaped ethnic fighting in the region and have been placed into 90 sites along a 500km stretch of the river Ubangi - the natural border between the two Congos.

Many refugees are saying that they cannot go back to the DR Congo because they fear government forces and rebel militia groups, who the refugees claim are attacking, people from their ethnic groups.

DR Congo's massive mineral wealth has drawn in neighboring countries into the conflict, exacerbating the refugee crisis.

According to the New York-based Human Rights Watch, more than 1,400 civilians have been murdered this year by both Congolese troops and rebels, sparking Africa's worst refugee crisis.

The UN maintains the world's largest peacekeeping force in the DR Congo with about 19,000 blue helmets deployed in the country.

And yet Fatoumata Lejeune Kaba, the UNHCR spokesman in Congo-Brazzaville, said that nearly three months into this emergency, not even a quarter of the needs of the refugees have been met.

Al Jazeera's Mohammed Adow reports from Liboko, Congo-Brazzaville, the centre of Africa's worst refugee crisis.

Central African Republic: Tackling Impunity Key Challenge for Country, Says UN Rights Chief

Un News Service

Addressing impunity for human rights violations is one of the top challenges facing the Central African Republic (CAR), as it enters the final stretch before elections, a senior United Nations official said today.

High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, who is on a one-day visit to the nation, told reporters in the capital, Bangui, that the election scheduled for 18 April "presents a tremendous opportunity for the Central African Republic, both to show the world and the people of the

Central African Republic that it can hold successful, free and fair elections, and to take a great leap forward towards securing a peaceful democratic future."

The key to the "future well-being of this great country," she pointed out, lies in bolstering the rule of law, strengthening the justice system and putting an end to violence and exploitation.

It is especially vital, the official told reporters, to root out continuing impunity for human rights violations, especially among law enforcement agents and the armed forces.

She said that she had urged the Government to step up its actions to provide redress to victims and bring perpetrators to justice.

"Summary executions, enforced disappearances, illegal arrests and detention are all issues that have surfaced in connection with state security and defense institutions, and strenuous efforts need to be made to put an end to these extremely serious abuses of power."

Ms. Pillay, who met with Prime Minister Faustin Archange Touadera and other officials during her visit, praised the Government for demonstrating its willingness to work with the UN human rights system, as well as for the National Assembly's recent revision of penal and criminal procedure codes, which she said will help bolster the independence of the judiciary and serve as an ally in the fight against impunity.

CAR is one of the world's poorest and most neglected countries, ranking 179 out of 182 countries in the 2009 Human Development Report compiled by the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

The High Commissioner noted that the nation is beset by problems on both the domestic and international fronts, including banditry and the activity of armed groups in the northern Vakaga region, as well as the presence of the "particularly vicious" Ugandan rebel group known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which operates in eastern CAR.

She voiced deep concern over the widespread sexual violence women face in the country, with crimes being committed by both State and non-State actors, including the LRA. She also said she was worried about the targeting of women accused of being witches, "a gender-based calumny that has no place in any society in the 21st century."

All governments, she underscored, must take firm steps to halt such crimes, and "those responsible should be prosecuted and, if found guilty, should receive appropriate punishment, irrespective of who they are."

Other problems that require urgent action include female genital mutilation, which is banned by law in the CAR, and the recruitment of child soldiers.

Ms. Pillay's visit to CAR was the first-ever by a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and while in the country, she also met with representatives of non-governmental organizations and other civil society groups.

Religious leaders, football stars and actors back 'Candles for Rwanda' initiative as Rwanda marks anniversary of end of 1994 genocide

www.candles4rwanda.org

17 July 09 - The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams, Chelsea striker Didier Drogba and Hollywood star Danny Glover are among the latest public figures to light candles on camera as part of 'Candles for Rwanda', a global initiative to mark the 15th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide and help destitute survivors who are still suffering from its consequences 15 years on.

"The tragedy of Rwanda is that for a while, people completely forgot the humanity of their neighbours. People who had lived side by side for generations, people familiar with each other who knew each other well as human beings, suddenly forgot that other people were human beings. And that is always what happens when genocide occurs," says Dr Rowan Williams in lighting his candle at Lambeth Palace. "The people of Rwanda are rebuilding bravely and prayerfully and hopefully at the moment, and our prayers and our thoughts are with them. All of us join with those prayers, that we may never again, anywhere in the World, forget the humanity of our neighbours; that we may all be prepared to stand alongside our neighbours in love, in solidarity, and in compassion."

Didier Drogba: "Even if this flame ceases to burn, we have to remember all of our brothers who are gone"

"I light this candle in honour and homage to the victims of the genocide, simply so we can remember," says Didier Drogba. "Even if this flame ceases to burn, we have to remember all of our brothers who are gone, and the conditions in which they went. It's important not to forget our past; it's important to remember our past, to avoid committing again in the future the mistakes which were made. So all my support, and here, this flame, the symbol of my homage to the Rwandan people."

"It's a courageous act to dispel all of your fears, your anger, and all the historic pain that has been a part of that experience for the people, to take on the task now of healing," says Danny Glover. "That process of healing not only involves the Rwandan people but it also involves all of us as part of the human experience and the human family."

Both Danny Glover and Didier Drogba lit their candles at the Kigali Memorial Centre in Rwanda, a site where over 250,000 victims of the genocide lie buried.

Over the course of 100 days from 7 April 1994, around a million children, women and men were slaughtered in Rwanda simply because they were Tutsi. Hutus opposed to the onslaught were also killed. The international community knew what was happening and the media reported on it, but nothing was done to intervene.

Today, despite the trauma of the past, Rwanda is rebuilding and its economy is growing. However, thousands of survivors whose homes, means of living, loved ones and communities were taken away from them are still suffering the material consequences of the genocide.

'Candles for Rwanda' is intended to help change all that. Coordinated by the Aegis Trust, the initiative encourages people everywhere to go online and donate £5.00 to help survivors rebuild their lives. And for every £5.00 donation, a candle will be lit on behalf of the donor at the Kigali Memorial Centre.

On Sunday, a national event will be held in Rwanda to mark the 15th anniversary of the end of the 1994 genocide. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Didier Drogba and Danny Glover will appear in a film that will be screened at the event featuring a host of public figures and celebrities from around the World who over the past three months have lit candles for Rwanda.

Children still recruited into DRC's war ranks

Afrol News,

Youngsters are still being recruited within the ranks of both the rebels and the national army, despite efforts to end the use of child soldiers in the war-torn east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with girls at particular risk of becoming sex slaves and less likely to be released, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has said.

"Used as combatants, labor and sex slaves, victims of months-long violence and rape, girls are all too rarely freed by the armed forces and groups," UNICEF said in a news release in Goma, eastern DRC, marking the International Day against the use of Child Soldiers, noting that only 20 percent of freed children under the agency's care were girls.

While welcoming Government efforts, including the adoption of a law punishing recruiters of child soldiers with 20 years in prison, UNICEF noted that children were still being recruited or forced into the national army and armed groups.

In a message marking the Day at the weekend, Grand Duchess Maria Teresa of Luxembourg, UNICEF Eminent Advocate for Children, noted that nearly 250,000 child soldiers are serving in various conflicts around the world. "Oblivious to danger in the face of death, easily impressionable and vulnerable, children are the expendable pawns in a deadly game orchestrated by adults," she said.

Since 2004 more than 36,000 children in the DRC have been rescued from armed forces and groups, mostly in the east. In 2000, nearly 6,000 youngsters were freed, but only 1,222 of these were girls.

"The place for children, whether boys or girls, is within the family, never within an armed group," UNICEF Country Representative Pierette Vu Thi said. "All children, and especially young girls, associated with armed forces and groups are traumatized by their experience and need very special care. It is vital that they return to a child's life as quickly as possible."

Earlier last week the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that the number of women raped in

eastern DRC topped 8,000 last year. Although the mainly Rwandan ethnic Hutu rebel militia, known as the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), which has been operating in the DRC since 1994 Rwandan genocide, are thought to be responsible for most rapes, members of the national army are also guilty of sexual abuse, it added.