

Report # 109
BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
Central Africa
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Weekly Report from 28 February to March 2010
Presentation: 10th March 2010

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Summary

Political Developments

Analysis: Tensions high in run-up to Burundi elections

Burundi approaches elections designed to cap the country's democratic transition after years of civil conflict, there is growing concern about worsening security and limits to political freedom. Elections for councilors in Burundi's 117 communes take place on 21 May. There is a presidential election on 28 June, a legislative poll on 23 July, and senators will be elected on 28 July. In September, Burundians will vote for heads of 2,639 "collines", the country's smallest administrative units. CNDD opposition party spokesman says people are killed in their houses for unknown reasons. He states that when we organize meetings, the Imbonerakure break them up and beat our supporters, he referred to the ruling party's youth arm, whose name means "those with foresight".

In the absence of the free exercise of political competition, people will not have the right to choose whoever they want. Coupled with the opposition parties' mistrust of the government's ability to organize free and fair elections, this could lead to the rejection of the election results. Ruling party spokesman Onesime Nduwimana dismissed the idea that politics or the elections were linked to recent killings in Burundi.

Rwanda: Ruling Party Has the Right to Summon Officials - SG

The Secretary General of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), François Ngarambe, yesterday said that the ruling party had the right to summon any public official to account for their mistakes. Ngarambe was referring to allegations by exiled former Ambassador to India, Gen. Kayumba Nyamwasa, who claimed to have fled because the RPF had interrogated him and wanted to force him to confess to crimes he never committed.

Rwanda: Grenade Attacks Leave 16 Injured

At least 16 people were yesterday evening wounded in two simultaneous grenade attacks in the city. One of the attacks took place in Kimironko close to the taxi park, while the other occurred at Kinamba on the way to Gisozi Genocide Memorial Centre. The grenades exploded during the heavy rain Thursday evening at around 19 hrs.

Rwanda: Kagame Receives GLT Chairman

President Paul Kagame, yesterday, received Sam Hamdan, the Chairman of the Global Leadership Team (GLT) at Urugwiro Village. Hamdan had come to deliver the Most Innovative People Award given to the President for inspiring the country's transformation. "We are honored to be here today. We have come to Rwanda to honour President Kagame with the Most Innovative People Award for his actions over the past

few years in transforming Rwanda into one of the top business reformers in the world," he said. Kagame joins the ranks of other global leaders, among them Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Bill Gates, the President of Finland Halja Taronen, Prof. Steven Hawking who have won these awards.

Rwanda Seeks Extradition of Former First Lady

Rwanda is seeking the extradition of a former first lady who was arrested by French authorities Tuesday on genocide-related charges. France is reaching out to Rwanda after years of cold relations, which have stemmed from allegations that France was closely linked with the genocide perpetrators. France has detained Agathe Habyarimana, the widow of the former Rwandan leader whose death in 1994 set off the ethnic slaughter which killed 800,000 in just 100 days.

Rwanda Welcomes Arrest of Former President's Wife

Rwanda has welcomed the arrest by France of the widow of a former Rwandan president whose death is considered to have unleashed the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The arrest of Agathe Habyarimana comes at Kigali's demand - and takes place just days after French President Nicolas Sarkozy paid a groundbreaking visit to Rwanda, aimed to mend ties strained over the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Habyarimana, the 67-year-old widow of former Rwandan resident Juvenal Habyarimana, was taken into custody at her home in a Paris suburb. She first arrived in France shortly after the genocide, and was refused refugee status here last year.

Rwanda: FDU's Ingabire Disowns Partner

After vehemently covering up and denying that her assistant, Joseph Ntawangundi, participated in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, the embattled Victoire Ingabire has now dissociated herself from her aide. Realizing that that she had been backing the wrong horse, Ingabire finally ate her hat in a bid to control the damage caused by her former right-hand man.

Congo-Kinshasa: First Set of UN Troops Could Leave by June, Says Peacekeeping Chief

UN News Service

The first group of United Nations troops could leave the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by the end of June, as requested by the Government, the world body's top peacekeeping official said on Friday following a visit to the country. Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Alain Le Roy was in the DRC this week as part of a

technical assessment mission, during which he also met with President Joseph Kabila and other officials to discuss the future of the UN mission, known as MONUC.

Congo-Kinshasa: EU Urged to Ban 'Conflict Minerals'

After the United States senate's move to stem the flow of money from mineral mines fuelling the brutal civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the watchdog group Global Witness (GW) is calling on Europe to follow suit. According to GW, armed groups control much of the mineral trade in the eastern DRC. These armed groups profit from the multi-million dollar mineral trade by forcibly controlling the mines and exacting bribes or taxes. Those buying the "conflict minerals" include companies based in EU member states. The role of the mineral trade has been recognized as one of the factors fuelling the violence and contributing to human rights violations in eastern DRC since the start of the war.

Tanzania: Diplomat - Security Situation in DRC Fragile

Security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is still fragile despite efforts by the international community to bring lasting peace in the troubled region, a senior diplomat revealed. Ms Liberata Mulamula, the executive secretary of the International Conference of the Great Lakes told journalists that the area is still prone to fighting between various armed groups sucked in the bloody conflict for years. She said although forces aligned to renegade Laurent Nkunda, which terrorised the region for much of 2008 have been neutralised there are still pockets of fighting involving various rebel groups, including the Mai Mai.

Economic Developments

Rwanda: SORWATOM Clears Rwf215 Million in Farmers' Arrears

Tomato processor, SORWATOM, has said that it cleared the Rwf214.5 million arrears it owed to out growers who had a contract to supply the company with tomatoes. Eight cooperatives comprised of about 1,000 members, that supplied tomatoes to SORWATOM had spent four months without pay.

Rwanda: Parliament Should Speed Up Business Related Laws -BNR

The Central Bank wants Parliament to give special treatment to the pending bills related to business in order to ease business operations through improved legal regimes. The National Bank of Rwanda (BNR) says that currently there are many pending bills in Parliament that need to be approved, something that hinders investment and business growth. Some of the laws included, the law regulating the operations of the Credit Reference Bureau (CRB), a law on electronic payment and a Central Securities Depository (CSD).

Congo-Kinshasa: Dams, Rivers, and Stolen Millions

The Democratic Republic of Congo's bad luck is to be rich in resources. Foreign investors are pouring billions of dollars into large extractive projects such as mines and hydropower dams. In a classic case of the resource curse, these projects are not promoting the country's long-term development, but attracting short-term profiteers, conflict, and corruption. In the latest example for this trend, the World Bank has just reported huge delays and cost overruns for the rehabilitation of the Inga 1 and 2 hydropower dams. Other projects are being swallowed by the morass of Congo's resource curse at the same time. In 2003, the World Bank committed US\$179 million towards the reconstruction of a transmission line from the Inga dams to Southern Congo. A few years later, the World Bank, African Development Bank and European Investment Bank approved more than US\$500 million in funding to rehabilitate the ailing dams on the Congo River.

Social Developments

DRC-RWANDA: Hard homecoming for Kivu returnees

For the many thousands of people displaced by conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo's Kivu regions who have returned to their villages, home has its many hardships. Many people returned home to find their land occupied, while renewed clashes in return areas also forced people to flee again soon after their arrival home. In North and South Kivu, there are 1.36 million IDPs, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In the North Kivu capital of Goma, some 77,000 people live in IDP camps, against about twice that number two years ago.

Human Rights Group Opposes Withdrawal of U.N. Troops from DRC

Amnesty International says it opposes the DRC government's call for U.N. forces to withdraw from the country by the middle of next year. U.N. troops (MONUC) and government forces are currently involved in another joint operation to try to drive out Rwandan Hutu rebel forces in the east of the country. Similar offensives also have been launched in the past against the Ugandan LRA rebels in the country.

The eastern DRC has been marred by conflict for many years resulting in millions of deaths, most of them civilians.

DRC Rights Groups Urge that Abusive Army Colonel Be Ousted

A coalition of 50 human rights NGO's and civil society groups has launched a formal complaint against a Congolese army colonel for brutally treating women, children, and refugee victims of war in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Human Rights Watch spearheaded Monday's appeal to urge senior DRC officers to investigate and

relieve Lieutenant Colonel Innocent Zimurinda of his command. The petitioners claim that since 2007, Zimurinda has massacred civilians, ordered rapes, and the recruitment of child soldiers, and directed the slaughter of more than 100 Rwandan Hutu refugees during an offensive in North Kivu province last April.

Central African Republic: Top UN Official Spotlights Plight of Refugees in Cameroon

A senior United Nations official this week sought to raise awareness of the "forgotten tragedy" of ethnic Mbororo refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR), as he stopped in Cameroon, where they are seeking refuge. High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres was warmly received at the Mandjou and Bolembe settlements, which together are home to 3,000 refugees and are situated some 350 kilometers east of Cameroon's capital, Yaoundé. The Mbororos are mostly nomadic cattle breeders from the west and northwest of neighboring CAR. Those who have fled to Cameroon since 2005 said they have been targeted by rebels and others for their cattle, with women and children being kidnapped for ransom.

Details News

Political Developments

Analysis: Tensions high in run-up to Burundi elections

BUJUMBURA, 4 March 2010 (IRIN) - As Burundi approaches elections designed to cap the country's democratic transition after years of civil conflict, there is growing concern about worsening security and limits to political freedom.

"The situation is explosive," Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, chairman of the Association for the Promotion of Human and Prisoner Rights (APRODH), told IRIN.

"Demobilised people [former members of now defunct armed groups] have become uncontrollable," he said. (Read an IRIN story on the prevalence of weapons and political youth wings)

"Youths from the [ruling] CNDD-FDD party cause many problems in the country. But in reaction, the [opposition] FRODEBU youth has become very active. Judging by their name, Intakangwa, which means 'those who cannot be frightened', they are prepared to respond to any provocation," said Mbonimpa.

Elections for councillors in Burundi's 117 communes take place on 21 May. There is a presidential election on 28 June, a legislative poll on 23 July, and senators will be elected on 28 July. In September, Burundians will vote for heads of 2,639 "collines", the country's smallest administrative units.

"People are killed in their houses for unknown reasons," according to François Bizimana, spokesman for the CNDD opposition party.

"When we organize meetings, the Imbonerakure break them up and beat our supporters," he said, referring to the ruling party's youth arm, whose name means "those with foresight".

"Some of our supporters are arrested. How can people come to meetings under such conditions? How can people vote for our programme if we have no chance to explain it?" he asked.

"They used to sing war songs to intimidate our members, but they have now passed from threats to acts, killing our supporters here and there," alleged Jean-Bosco Havyarimana, spokesman for the National Liberation Forces, one of several rebel groups turned political parties.

Destabilizing factor

Party youth wings are a “major destabilizing factor” in Burundi, Gertrude Kazoviyo, deputy president of the Observatory of Government Action, warned while presenting the annual report of the Forum of Civil Society Organizations in late February.

Alexis Sinduhije, leader of another opposition party, the Movement for Solidarity and Democracy, who spent several months in jail in late 2008 and early 2009 for insulting President Pierre Nkurunziza, accused “agents of the national intelligence service” of killing two student members of his party in February 2010.

“I do not know if an arrest warrant has been issued, but they have not been prosecuted,” he told IRIN.

Ruling party spokesman Onesime Nduwimana dismissed the idea that politics or the elections were linked to recent killings in Burundi. Cases of one kind of manslaughter or another feature in newspapers on an almost daily basis. According to APRODH, in 2009 there were 411 killings in Burundi, a country of some eight million inhabitants.

“We have a history of conflicts of every kind, conflict over land... People can kill each other because of what they have gone through during the civil war. But there is a tendency to use some facts for political ends,” he said.

For Salathiere Muntunutwiwe, a political analyst and university lecturer, the prevailing climate imperils the whole electoral process.

“In the absence of the free exercise of political competition, people will not have the right to choose whoever they want. Coupled with the opposition parties’ mistrust of the government’s ability to organize free and fair elections, this could lead to the rejection of the election results,” he said.

Isolated cases

But as far as the ruling party chairman was concerned, by and large the situation was under control. “There are isolated cases in provinces where the administration is weak and not well organized, like Kirundo [in the north], or zones like Kinama, in the capital. However, those behind such acts are punished accordingly,” Nduwimana said.

“Compared with the situation of the 1960s and in 1993 the situation is more favorable . Today there is no ethnic or regional mistrust among Burundians, there is no situation of war as it was in 1993,” he added.

While discounting the likelihood of a return to full-scale war, Sinduhije, the once-jailed opposition leader, believes the instability is a deliberate ploy by the ruling party “to have its term extended or to force people to vote for it”.

A view echoed by FRODEBU's chairman, Leonce Ngendakumana, who in late February accused elements of the police and army of "intimidating the population to force them to vote for the ruling party".

Police neutrality questioned

The partisan nature of some in the security forces is in part due to the fact that many were drawn from former rebel groups integrated into state machinery after signing peace accords.

"In spite of the training, some elements of the national security forces have not yet [internalized] that they have to remain neutral during the electoral process," explained Kazoviyo of the Observatory of Government Action.

In a February report on Burundi, Ensuring credible elections, the International Crisis Group also noted that "the police have remained passive or become accomplices to the ruling party abuses".

"There are thus legitimate fears they could become politicized, similar to the national intelligence service, which is already trying to destabilize the opposition," ICG warned, calling for neighbouring countries to provide a regional force to help train their Burundian counterparts and to support election security and monitoring.

Grievances over living conditions among the lower ranks are yet another cause for concern, after protests led to some arrests and sackings.

"There is serious mistrust between junior officers and commanders. A delegation of junior officers came and told me that if their claims were not met before the elections, the polling stations would be burned," Mbonimpa, the human rights activist, told IRIN.

Rwanda: Ruling Party Has the Right to Summon Officials - SG

The New Times

Kigali — The Secretary General of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), François Ngarambe, yesterday said that the ruling party had the right to summon any public official to account for their mistakes.

Ngarambe was referring to allegations by exiled former Ambassador to India, Gen. Kayumba Nyamwasa, who claimed to have fled because the RPF had interrogated him and wanted to force him to confess to crimes he never committed.

"Why should he question my asking him to give a report to RPF on duties he was assigned to by the nation? His assignment as Rwanda's Ambassador to India was political and not military," Ngarambe told a press conference at his offices.

"But you know, some people seeking refuge sometimes tend to concoct sensational reasons".

Ngarambe explained that by summoning Kayumba, he wasn't interfering with the work of security and judicial organs, but that he only asked him to put into writing the mistakes he admitted to have committed.

"It is the RPF that made Kayumba an Ambassador, it is the RPF that made it possible for him to become a General," Ngarambe pointed out.

He added that the RPF had been at the forefront of spurring this nation to prosperity, and was confident that the people were aware of the fact.

The Secretary General revealed that it is the RPF Congress that would choose its candidate for the forthcoming Presidential elections set for August.

"We will announce our candidate in May," he said.

Rwanda: Grenade Attacks Leave 16 Injured

The New Times

Kigali — At least 16 people were yesterday evening wounded in two simultaneous grenade attacks in the city.

One of the attacks took place in Kimironko close to the taxi park, while the other occurred at Kinamba on the way to Gisozi Genocide Memorial Centre.

The grenades exploded during the heavy rain Thursday evening at around 19 hrs.

It was not clear by press time who was behind the attacks, but Police says investigations are ongoing.

"We are still investigating the case, details will be released later," said the Police Spokesman Eric Kayiranga when contacted last night.

The Kimironko attack injured 12 people who were rushed to Kibagabaga Hospital while the Kinamba attack left four with minor injuries.

Senior security officers and senior government officials rushed to the scene immediately after the attack.

"The Kimironko attack left two people critically injured while the rest sustained minor injuries including those at Kinamba," Kigali City vice Mayor in charge of Social Affairs, Jeanne d'Arc Gakuba Gakuba, said.

"The situation is under control and concerned authorities are doing their job to put things to order".

Rwanda: Kagame Receives GLT Chairman

The New Times

Kigali — President Paul Kagame, yesterday, received Sam Hamdan, the Chairman of the Global Leadership Team (GLT) at Urugwiro Village.

Hamdan had come to deliver the Most Innovative People Award given to the President for inspiring the country's transformation.

"We are honored to be here today. We have come to Rwanda to honour President Kagame with the Most Innovative People Award for his actions over the past few years in transforming Rwanda into one of the top business reformers in the world," he said.

"These reforms over the years have been well acknowledged by many institutions worldwide," Hamdan said.

Hamdan said that the Detroit-based organisation which is an innovations holding company and works with global institutions like the World Bank and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also honoured President Kagame with another award.

"We have also awarded the President with the Innovation for Peace Award because of his relentless drive to focus his policies on the citizens of Rwanda, and his ability to lobby the international private sectors and other partners to help transform Rwanda into a knowledge-based economy," Hamdan said.

He added that the awards are in recognition of President Kagame's courage and foresight and his connected leadership which puts the citizens at the centre of his policies and his ability to execute and get things done.

Kagame joins the ranks of other global leaders, among them Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Bill Gates, the President of Finland Halja Taronen, Prof. Steven Hawking who have won these awards.

Rwanda Seeks Extradition of Former First Lady

VOA

Rwanda is seeking the extradition of a former first lady who was arrested by French authorities Tuesday on genocide-related charges. France is reaching out to Rwanda after years of cold relations, which have stemmed from allegations that France was closely

linked with the genocide perpetrators.

France has detained Agathe Habyarimana, the widow of the former Rwandan leader whose death in 1994 set off the ethnic slaughter which killed 800,000 in just 100 days.

Her accusers paint Habyarimana as a powerful behind-the-scenes figure and a central leader within the circle of Hutu radicals responsible for planning the massacre. A recent report commissioned by the current Rwandan government suggests that she may have been involved in the plot to kill her husband, who at the time of his death had just signed a controversial power-sharing deal with a Tutsi rebel force.

She and her family have always denied involvement in the mass killings.

Rwandan Foreign Affairs minister Louise Mushikiwabo praised the arrest by French authorities, who were acting on an international warrant issued by Rwanda.

"We welcome the move," said Louise Mushikiwabo. "We think that justice delayed is justice denied, and a number of people in Rwanda have been waiting to hear what happens with Habyarimana's widow. The people who know her in Rwanda from back then testify that she was quite involved in the preparation of the genocide."

The Rwandan official says that her country will push for the suspect to be sent back to Rwanda for trial, but also suggested that whether Habyarimana faces charges is more important than where the trial would take place.

"Ideally she should be extradited to Rwanda to face justice where the crime was committed, there is no question about it," said Mushikiwabo. "That is what we are demanding. But for her, as for many other people that are implicated in this genocide, we want first and foremost justice. The important thing is that there is justice somewhere, especially because this is a crime that is not just against Rwandans but against humanity."

The French, who were close allies with Juvenal Habyarimana's regime, reportedly flew the late leader's widow out of the country as events spiraled out of control following her husband's assassination.

She has sought political asylum in France, where she has resided for a number of years, but her request has never been granted.

The sudden move to act on the arrest warrant is seen as part of a broader diplomatic gesture from France that it is serious about improving its battered ties with the tiny central African nation. Rwandan President Paul Kagame once led the Tutsi rebel force that eventually ended the genocide, and his allies have accused France of arming the Hutu militias who carried out the Tutsi extermination campaign.

France has always rebuffed claims that it was directly linked to the mass killings. But in a short trip to Kigali last week, which included a visit to a genocide memorial, French

President Nicolas Sarkozy made the strongest statement of French regret yet, admitting "mistakes" were made, as well as "errors of judgment" and "errors of politics."

President Kagame cut off diplomatic relations with the European nation in 2006 after a French judge accused him and nine of his aides of shooting down President Habyarimana's plane. Official ties were restored in November.

The French in January also arrested a Hutu physician who is suspected to have led the murder of Tutsi in his village.

Rwanda Welcomes Arrest of Former President's Wife

VOA

Rwanda has welcomed the arrest by France of the widow of a former Rwandan president whose death is considered to have unleashed the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

The arrest of Agathe Habyarimana comes at Kigali's demand - and takes place just days after French President Nicolas Sarkozy paid a groundbreaking visit to Rwanda, aimed to mend ties strained over the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The Rwandan government accuses her of participating in planning the bloodbath that killed 800,000 people.

Habyarimana, the 67-year-old widow of former Rwandan resident Juvenal Habyarimana, was taken into custody at her home in a Paris suburb. She first arrived in France shortly after the genocide, and was refused refugee status here last year. Between 2001 and 2002, he went into alliances with a number of groups, mainly in Europe coalescing around the FDLR. Most of the time he has acted as Secretary General and spokesman for these groups

In 2004, Mushayidi decided to form PDN-Igihango becoming the Secretary General and went into an alliance with Lt. Col. Christophe Hakizabera's faction, FDLR-CMC.

In 2008, PDN joined forces with Gen Emmanuel Habyarimana, Theobald Rwaka, and another offshoot of the FDLR, RUD-Urunana to form Partenariat Intwari. Again Mushayidi was elected Secretary General. Later, Deo Mushayidi decided to go his own way, announcing the launch of his own violent activities, under the PDP-Imanzi banner in 2009.

He claimed several times, on his internet postings, that he was carrying out military operations in Rwanda and that his headquarters were at Kinyihira, in Northern Rwanda.

Rwanda: FDU's Ingabire Disowns Partner

The New Times

Kigali — After vehemently covering up and denying that her assistant, Joseph Ntawangundi, participated in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, the embattled Victoire Ingabire has now dissociated herself from her aide.

Realising that that she had been backing the wrong horse, Ingabire finally ate her hat in a bid to control the damage caused by her former right-hand man.

In a vague communiqué released yesterday, the head of the yet-to-be-registered political party, FDU-Inkingi, finally admitted that Ntawangundi had concealed his past.

"At this stage, troubling details about his curriculum vitae raise a certain amount of questions on the information he volunteered before the arrest. This has resulted in regrettable errors in our press release dated 05th February," reads part of Ingabire's statement.

"Therefore we dissociate ourselves explicitly from the earlier records of his occupational environment, and call on serious investigations."

When news of Ntawangundi's genocidal past first broke last month, Ingabire and her group, FDU-Inkingi, attacked The New Times, accusing it of a deliberate plan to smear her yet-to-be-registered party.

She claimed that Ntawangundi was had left the country for Kenya two years before the Genocide.

In a stinging attack, Ingabire said that the newspaper was "recklessly issuing fabricated stories without giving any chance of counter evidence, in total disregard of media ethics" and challenged it "to produce any evidence of its allegations, at least for the sake of the readers' respect".

The New Times in partnership with Radio Contact FM took up the challenge and even took their investigations outside the country and came up with an explosive exposé.

Ingabire earlier argued that her former aide never worked in the education sector or worked as a head teacher at the school in question. She said the accused left Rwanda in 1992 to work with the International Confederation of Free Trade Union African Regional Organisation ICFTU- AFRO in Nairobi and was not in Rwanda during the Genocide.

Investigations by the two media houses proved the contrary.

Many witnesses, from members of the Baptist Church (AEBR) who recruited Ntawangundi, former students, and even a truck driver who helped him move his belongings from his residence in Kacyiru to his new station in Rukira, to his former mistress with whom they have a 15-year old daughter, went on the record.

Even ICFTU-AFRO, who later relocated from Nairobi, Kenya to Lome, Togo, revealed that Ntawangundi's records start from 2000, and not 1993 as FDU's Ingabire had claimed.

In 2007, Ntawangundi was found guilty of Genocide and sentenced to 19 years by a Gacaca court in the Eastern Province.

The charges include killing his colleague's two children and causing the deaths of students under his care while he was head teacher at a school in the former Commune of Rukira.

Ntawangundi is now serving his prison sentence at Mpanga Prison in the Southern Province.

Congo-Kinshasa: First Set of UN Troops Could Leave by June, Says Peacekeeping Chief

UN News Service

The first group of United Nations troops could leave the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by the end of June, as requested by the Government, the world body's top peacekeeping official said on Friday following a visit to the country.

Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Alain Le Roy was in the DRC this week as part of a technical assessment mission, during which he also met with President Joseph Kabila and other officials to discuss the future of the UN mission, known as MONUC.

Following a closed-door briefing to the Security Council on his trip, which also included a visit to Chad, Mr. Le Roy told reporters that the Congolese Government has requested that the first drawdown of MONUC take place around June 2010 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the country's independence.

"There was clear agreement on the critical tasks to be implemented before MONUC would eventually leave the DRC. But the first troops might be able to leave - those from the west - around 30 June 2010," Mr. Le Roy stated.

The 10-year-old MONUC, whose mandate is up for renewal in May, is tasked with protecting civilians in DRC, where over 1.25 million people have been uprooted or re-displaced by violence in the eastern part of the country and the volatile security situation has hampered aid agencies' efforts to provide assistance.

The mission also supports operations by the national armed forces, primarily logistical support limited to Congolese operations that are underway, including such things as fuel, transport and evacuations of wounded personnel.

It is currently supporting Operation Amani Leo, which technically began on 1 January but has moved into an operational phase recently, against the mainly Rwandan Hutu rebel group FDLR in eastern DRC.

There are also operations taking place in the east by Congolese forces against the rebel Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

"In the east, it would take much more time before we can think of withdrawing military forces from there," said Mr. Le Roy.

On Chad, the UN peacekeeping chief said he proposed to the Council that authorize a two-month technical rollover of the mandate of the UN mission in Chad and the Central African Republic, known as MINURCAT, whose mandate expires on 15 March.

The Government of Chad had called for the withdrawal of the military component of MINURCAT, which was set up in 2007 after tensions increased along the border with Sudan's war-torn Darfur region.

Mr. Le Roy said the two-month extension, which was agreed with the Chadian Government, would "give some time to try to find agreement with the Chadian authorities on the future of MINURCAT in Chad," adding that many Council members stressed the importance of keeping the mission on the ground.

Congo-Kinshasa: EU Urged to Ban 'Conflict Minerals'

IPS

Stockholm — After the United States senate's move to stem the flow of money from mineral mines fuelling the brutal civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the watchdog group Global Witness (GW) is calling on Europe to follow suit.

"We are calling on the European Union (EU) to introduce legislation to exclude conflict minerals from eastern DRC coming into the European market," Lizzie Parsons from GW, an international organisation investigating the links between natural resource exploitation and human rights abuses, told IPS.

According to GW, armed groups control much of the mineral trade in the eastern DRC. These armed groups profit from the multi-million dollar mineral trade by forcibly controlling the mines and exacting bribes or taxes. Those buying the "conflict minerals" include companies based in EU member states.

The role of the mineral trade has been recognised as one of the factors fuelling the violence and contributing to human rights violations in eastern DRC since the start of the war.

Human rights activists have long called attention to how "conflict minerals" are sold to purchase arms by rebel groups that regularly commit horrific abuses against civilian populations, including mass murder, rape, torture and forced recruitment.

Over the last few months, GW gathered information in the region and visited mines that are under the control of armed groups.

Parsons says the armed groups would have been a lot poorer and much less well-armed without the trade. "We do know that the mineral trade is a significant proportion of their income."

GW is calling on suppliers that source minerals from DRC to identify the mines they come from. They are also recommending spot checks and audits to back these declarations. According to the watchdog group a few companies have made some efforts, but that is not enough.

"The companies' policies have purely been on paper. And a number of companies, including for example Apple, have not acknowledged the problem at all," Parsons says.

The "conflict minerals" - tin (cassiterite), tantalum (coltan or columbite-tantalite), and tungsten (wolframite) - are, after they are mined, moved from DRC to East Asia where they are processed into valuable metals needed for electronic products. The metals are used in i-pods, digital cameras, cell phones and laptops worldwide.

Global Witness states that, so far, governments have done little to curb the trade in conflict minerals. But last year the U.S. made a move. In May 2009, a draft legislation requiring U.S. companies to disclose the origin of their mineral supplies was introduced in the senate.

According to the EU Special Representative for the African Great Lakes, Roeland van de Geer, the EU has confirmed its commitment to more formal and legal ways of cooperating in the fight against illegal exploitation of conflict minerals.

But so far, the EU has not introduced any legislation to exclude conflict minerals from eastern DRC entering Europe.

"Some experts are suggesting an adapted 'Kimberly model', similar to the one regarding diamonds, while others think that it is unlikely that international legal measures would make a contribution to the fight against illegal exploitation of minerals," Van de Geer told IPS.

His office currently serves as the secretariat of a task force on illegal exploitation of natural resources in the east of the DRC.

The United Nations Security Council has passed a resolution paving the way for the imposition of asset freezes and travel bans on companies that support armed groups in eastern DRC via the illicit mineral trade.

The illicit exploitation of natural resources is not a new phenomenon in eastern DRC. It has characterised the conflict since it first erupted in 1996 and has been well documented by non-governmental organisations and the United Nations Panel of Experts.

Tanzania: Diplomat - Security Situation in DRC Fragile

The Citizen (Dar es Salaam)

Security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is still fragile despite efforts by the international community to bring lasting peace in the troubled region, a senior diplomat revealed here yesterday.

Ms Liberata Mulamula, the executive secretary of the International Conference of the Great Lakes told journalists that the area is still prone to fighting between various armed groups sucked in the bloody conflict for years.

She said although forces aligned to renegade Laurent Nkunda, which terrorised the region for much of 2008 have been neutralised there are still pockets of fighting involving various rebel groups, including the Mai Mai.

She affirmed, however, that the international community would not relent in its efforts to bring peace in DRC and other countries in the Great Lakes region which had their share of bloody conflicts in recent years.

Ambassador Mulamula was briefing reporters on the peace initiatives in the region at the start of the second regional forum on the prevention of genocide organised by the United Nations at an Arusha hotel.

She added that the international community was committed to see to it that there was no more genocide in the region which in 1994 witnessed one of the most horrific massacre in Rwanda and civil war in neighbouring Burundi.

Economic Developments

Rwanda: SORWATOM Clears Rwf215 Million in Farmers' Arrears

The New Times

Kigali — Tomato processor, SORWATOM, has said that it cleared the Rwf214.5 million arrears it owed to out growers who had a contract to supply the company with tomatoes.

Eight cooperatives comprised of about 1,000 members, that supplied tomatoes to SORWATOM had spent four months without pay.

"The reasons why we took long to make this payment was the financial constraints that we suffered," said Gloria Mukankuranga, the Director General of SORWATOM.

Besides the delayed payments, farmers also complain about the prices at which SORWATOM buys their tomatoes.

Jean Baptiste Muramutsa, a farmer says that a kilogram of tomatoes goes for Rwf100 on which they earn a net Rwf84 after transports costs.

"We wish the prices could be reconsidered and buy a kilogram at Rwf150 with transport costs inclusive or at Rwf100 without transport charges," explained Muramutsa.

Meanwhile SORWATOM has got a new Belgium investor who owns 80 percent shares and has promised a new working relationship with farmers.

The company that employees 35 permanent staff and over 100 part time workers, has the capacity to process 3,590 tonnes of tomatoes annually.

Rwanda: Parliament Should Speed Up Business Related Laws -BNR

The New Times

Kigali — The Central Bank wants Parliament to give special treatment to the pending bills related to business in order to ease business operations through improved legal regimes.

The National Bank of Rwanda (BNR) says that currently there are many pending bills in Parliament that need to be approved, something that hinders investment and business growth.

"These laws link Rwanda to the region and are critical in the process of easing business in the country," Central Bank Vice Governor, Amb.Claver Gatete, said during a telephone interview with Business Times.

Some of the laws mentioned by Gatete include the law regulating the operations of the Credit Reference Bureau (CRB), a law on electronic payment and a Central Securities Depository (CSD).

According to Gatete, the law establishing a Central Securities Depository and Credit Reference Bureau should be approved and put in the national gazette in May 2010 while the one on electronic payment should be available before the end of this year.

"These are cross-cutting laws which will have a quick impact, both in the process to ease doing business and also in our move towards financial sector development," Gatete emphasized.

BNR says that a robust legal framework is highly desirable because it raises public confidence in the country's payment system.

Gatete said that Cabinet is committed to passing the laws because easing doing business is a national program and it was discussed that every Rwandan in every capacity should strive to make the business environment better.

Other bills currently in Parliament and expected to spur financial sector development includes; the one governing Collective Investment Schemes (CIS) and the law establishing Capital Market Authority (CMA).

Congo-Kinshasa: Dams, Rivers, and Stolen Millions

Pambazuka News

OPINION

The Democratic Republic of Congo's bad luck is to be rich in resources. Foreign investors are pouring billions of dollars into large extractive projects such as mines and hydropower dams. In a classic case of the resource curse, these projects are not promoting the country's long-term development, but attracting short-term profiteers, conflict, and corruption.

In the latest example for this trend, the World Bank has just reported huge delays and cost overruns for the rehabilitation of the Inga 1 and 2 hydropower dams. Other projects are being swallowed by the morass of Congo's resource curse at the same time.

The Inga 1 and 2 dams were built on the Congo River in the 1970s and 1980s as part of a failed industrialisation scheme. Operating at only 40 per cent of capacity, the projects turned into white elephants and contributed heavily to the country's spiralling debt crisis. As International Rivers' Terri Hathaway discovered on a visit to the site, the people who

were displaced by the dams were never properly rehabilitated, and are still fighting for just compensation after several decades.

In 2003, the World Bank committed US\$179 million towards the reconstruction of a transmission line from the Inga dams to Southern Congo. A few years later, the World Bank, African Development Bank and European Investment Bank approved more than US\$500 million in funding to rehabilitate the ailing dams on the Congo River.

Rehabilitating existing dams makes sense as long as the use of funds is closely monitored. In 2007, International Rivers called on the World Bank to resolve the outstanding social problems of the Inga dams as part of its work on the new project. Two years later, the Bank informed us that it was indeed gathering information 'for an appropriate social development plan for the affected communities' as part of the Inga rehabilitation.

The relatively modest rehabilitation of the Inga dams and transmission lines has already run into serious problems. Around 2002, US\$110 million that the World Bank supposedly spent on Congo's electricity sector went missing. Last year, the Bank had to quietly double its lending for the transmission line. And on 23 February, Reuters reported that the rehabilitation of the Inga dams will be delayed for three years, cost an extra US\$300-\$400 million, and will be scaled back in scope. In other words, Congo will have to go deeper into debt for a smaller project whose benefits may materialise later. Without going into details, the World Bank blamed the setback on the poor quality of consultants' studies, implementation problems, and the effects of the world financial crisis.

On the very same day, bad news has reached us regarding two other big projects in Congo. An appeals court in Hong Kong decided that a signature bonus which a Chinese consortium paid when it signed a multi-billion dollar mining and infrastructure project will not go to the DRC's government, but rather to a vulture fund in the US. This fund bought up debt from the 1980s on which the Congo had defaulted a long time ago, and is also trying to lay its hands on the revenues of the Inga dams. The irony is that US\$24 million of the Chinese bonus has already disappeared into private pockets. A commission set up by the Congolese parliament charged that the millions were stolen by representatives of the state's mining company and local officials.

Also this week, the World Bank's private sector arm announced that it will not make any new investments in the Congo until a dispute over a mining project is resolved. Last August, the DRC government had cancelled the contract for a US\$553 million copper and cobalt project in which the World Bank had invested. 'If it turns out that contracts cannot be considered binding, that would be concerning to us,' a World Bank official said, feigning surprise about the lack of legal guarantees in the country.

As always, the details about such fraudulent schemes will not become public. But the big picture behind the daily scandals looks familiar. The elites in poor but resource-rich countries such as the DRC often have no interest in the actual operation of infrastructure or mining projects. This would require a long-term perspective which they cannot afford.

They rather try to skim off signature bonuses, bribes and other short-term benefits from an investment as quickly as they can. When new officials assume powerful positions, they also want to take their cuts, and so contracts get suspended, projects are being delayed, legal problems ensue, and the costs go up.

While the Inga 1 and 2 projects are toiling through this morass, power companies, governments and international funders are considering building the huge US\$80 billion Grand Inga Dam. This project would divert the Congo River and generate electricity for export to Southern Africa, Europe and possibly the Middle East. Just imagine the feeding frenzy that a honey pot of US\$80 billion would unleash within the DRC's elite and its international cronies.

The Congo's impoverished, war-ravaged population deserves support. The experience with the resource curse has shown time and again that large, top-down infrastructure and mining projects will not benefit the poor. Modest investments in decentralised infrastructure and in the economic activities of the local population have a better chance at reducing poverty. Rural electrification and support for the people affected by the Inga dams would be a good place to start.

This article first appeared on the International Rivers website. Peter Bosshard is the policy director of International Rivers.

Social Developments

DRC-RWANDA: Hard homecoming for Kivu returnees

IRIN

GOMA, 1 March 2010 (IRIN) - For the many thousands of people displaced by conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo's Kivu regions who have returned to their villages, home has its many hardships.

"Return has not always been durable, as the reduction of food rations in camps [for displaced people - IDPs] and the arrival of the new planting season rather than any improvement in security have led people to go back," the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) stated in a 24 February report.

"Many people returned home to find their land occupied, while renewed clashes in return areas also forced people to flee again soon after their arrival home," it said.

Across eastern DRC, "access to basic necessities ... has deteriorated over the last year in the context of military operations and reprisals and continuing abuses against the population. The vast majority of IDPs and returnees have no access to health centres and schools, or to clean water, food, seeds, tools or building materials," according to the report.

During 2009, according to IDMC, about a million people returned to their villages in North and South Kivu - about the same number who fled because of clashes, mainly between government forces and Rwandan Hutu rebels.

In North and South Kivu, there are 1.36 million IDPs, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

In the North Kivu capital of Goma, some 77,000 people live in IDP camps, against about twice that number two years ago.

"Many have gone back to their land, and we are getting noises that more want to return," Masti Notz, head of the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, in North Kivu told IRIN.

"Positive change is progressively taking place in Eastern DRC," Alan Doss, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, wrote in the East African newspaper on 1 March.

"While displacements and isolated attacks remain a problem in the Kivus, a number of people feel more secure today than they were a year ago," he added.

Status issues

Aid workers believe that in the wake of a tripartite agreement between Rwanda, DRC and UNHCR, many of the 50,000 DRC nationals living in Rwandan camps could soon return home.

Before the accord, thousands had already returned spontaneously. "In 2009 in Masisi, more than 6,000 people told us they had returned from Rwanda since 2000, under the auspices of various groups that controlled the area," Karl Steinacker, UNHCR coordinator for eastern DRC, said. "The challenge is to identify genuine civilians."

The status of the returnees, according to Refugees International, needs to be resolved given that some are Rwandans. There is also a need for stronger verification mechanisms to regulate future population movements.

In a 19 February statement, the group said locals had told its researchers of an area inside the Virunga National Park called "Coline Banyarwanda" ("the hill of those who come from Rwanda"), where they should not be.

Another large group of recently arrived Rwandans was living illegally in Bwiza, in a settlement inside the national park. In nearby Matanda, armed cattle herders had reportedly occupied land by force.

"It is important to note that these tensions are taking place in zones that are controlled by the former CNDP [The Congrès national pour la defense du peuple] rebel group, who are clearly protecting these Rwandans," it added.

The CNDP, led by Bosco Ntaganda, theoretically ceased to be a rebel movement with the integration of its elements into the Congolese army in 2009, but security sources in Goma say it has retained some of its structures.

Land pressures

Competition for land, exacerbated by the destabilizing effects of enforced or spontaneous migration, is more commonly a source of conflict than generally supposed, according to analysts.

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI), for example, argues that reallocations of land during conflict or the profit from sale or use of land can provide a means of sustaining such conflict.

In the Kivus, notes the Goma-based Pole Institute, the economy is historically based on agriculture and long-distance trade, while the economic dimension of ongoing conflict is about rights of access to land and control of trade routes, not about minerals.

Human Rights Group Opposes Withdrawal of U.N. Troops from DRC

VOA

“Massacres, rapes and looting continue in the country unabated.” Amnesty International says it opposes the DRC government’s call for U.N. forces to withdraw from the country by the middle of next year.

U.N. troops (MONUC) and government forces are currently involved in another joint operation to try to drive out Rwandan Hutu rebel forces in the east of the country. Similar offensives also have been launched in the past against the Ugandan LRA rebels in the country.

The eastern DRC has been marred by conflict for many years resulting in millions of deaths, most of them civilians. The human rights group says, “Massacres, rapes and looting continue in the country unabated.”

Andrew Philip, Amnesty International’s researcher on the DRC, says, “Yesterday, it was confirmed publicly and officially that the government has requested MONUC to leave the country by June 2011. -- a withdrawal that should commence, the government has asked, by June of this year,” he says.

Amnesty calls it a “very dangerous move on the part of the government.”

“We don’t think the time is right for a withdrawal, or indeed a substantial reduction of the U.N. peacekeeping force in the Congo,” he says.

Why now?

“The government is anxious because it’s facing elections in 2011. I think it’s anxious to demonstrate to its own population, to the rest of the world that the security situation in the east of the country is improving. I think it’s also nervous of too much international involvement in the DRC around the time of the elections. It has asked MONUC to leave mainly for political reasons,” he says.

However, Philip says the decision has “failed to take into account the real needs of its population or the risks involved.”

Many human rights groups and aid organizations have highlighted the ongoing violence against women in the eastern DRC. Rape, they say, is being used as a weapon of war to demoralize and subdue the population. Some women have been so brutally attacked, that doctors say even surgery cannot repair all the physical damage done.

“Let’s look at some basic facts. MONUC for the moment is mainly concentrated in two provinces in eastern DRC, which are the Kivus (North and South), which have a population of around 8 to 10 million. MONUC is currently the only force that is capable

of providing a measure of relative protection to that population,” he says.

The national army

Philip says, “The government army hasn’t proven itself capable of protecting civilians. And indeed itself has been responsible for numerous human rights violations. The real fear is that if MONUC is withdrawn the local population will be at the mercy of armed groups that still continue to operate in that part of the world.”

He also says the national army is not properly trained or equipped and is poorly led “or under direct government control in all cases.”

Is MONUC’s withdrawal mandatory following the government’s decision? Philip says, “This is a difficult area for the U.N. because of course they’re there with the permission and consent of the government. So in a sense their hands are tied a little bit by what the government says to them.”

However, he says the United Nations and the African Union could send a strong message to the government that now is not the time for MONUC to leave.

“It’s also I think incumbent on the government to think very hard and carefully about what it is asking MONUC to do. Many, many preconditions that had been set for the withdrawal of MONUC back in 2007 haven’t been met at all by the government. And it’s something they need to consider very carefully because, frankly, they’re playing fast and loose with the lives of their own people,” he says.

Last December, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution, which in part, reads: “Stressing the primary responsibility of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for ensuring security in its territory and protecting its civilians with respect for the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law, and stressing the importance of urgently undertaking comprehensive and lasting security sector reform and of permanently disarming, demobilizing, resettling or repatriating, as appropriate, and reintegrating Congolese and foreign armed groups for the long-term stabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.”

Amnesty says MONUC is the largest U.N. peacekeeping mission in the world with over 20,000 personnel. The current authorization for MONUC expires May 31st. The U.N. and the Congolese government are currently meeting on the issue.

DRC Rights Groups Urge that Abusive Army Colonel Be Ousted

VOA

A coalition of 50 human rights NGO's and civil society groups has launched a formal complaint against a Congolese army colonel for brutally treating women, children, and refugee victims of war in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Human Rights Watch spearheaded Monday's appeal to urge senior DRC officers to investigate and relieve Lieutenant Colonel Innocent Zimurinda of his command. The petitioners claim that since 2007, Zimurinda has massacred civilians, ordered rapes, and the recruitment of child soldiers, and directed the slaughter of more than 100 Rwandan Hutu refugees during an offensive in North Kivu province last April.

Human Rights Watch senior Congo researcher Anneke Van Woudenberg says that unless senior commander, General Amuli Bahigwa, replaces Colonel Zimurinda, the abuse will continue during a U.N.-DRC offensive planned to start early this year.

Recruited child soldier in the Democratic Republic of Congo

"He's been involved in multiple massacres in eastern Congo, specifically in the province of North Kivu – three big massacres, the most recent of which occurred in April of last year, when the colonel himself organized an operation against refugees, killing at least 129 of them in a really brutal and vicious operation, where many women were raped and also numerous people were killed, often at point-blank range. But he also has a track record of forced labor, of illegally taxing people, and also, of course, of widespread rape. And we're saying that it's time that proper judicial investigation start," she said.

After the refugee massacre, according to a U.N. report last October, survivors scattered in several directions, making it difficult for humanitarian groups to safeguard them from further violence.

"What we've been able to piece together, as well as the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Summary Executions, is that the individual responsible for those killings was this Lieutenant Colonel Innocent Zimurinda. And it's extraordinary that that individual remains in a position of command. And basically what we and 50 Congolese NGO's are saying is that it's time he's removed," she said.

Zimurinda has reportedly taken part in U.N.-backed Congolese military operations in eastern Congo during the past year and is expected to have a role in a new U.N.-supported offensive known as Amani Leo that is due to start within the next few weeks unless, Van Woudenberg says, the DRC command takes action to relieve him.

"Until we start someplace, we're never going to see any progress. And it starts one step at a time. And this is an important step for the Congolese army to take. Hold this man to account. Arrest him. Suspend him from the area of operations, and ensure that he's held to account," she said.

The Human Rights Watch researcher Van Woudenberg says that senior Congolese commander, General Bahigwa, is generally well-respected as a leader by his troops and has abided by a policy of zero-tolerance for war crimes and brutality committed against Congolese civilians. She says the petitioners are hopeful that the Goma command will draw the line and eliminate the torturous collateral treatment of war victims.

Central African Republic: Top UN Official Spotlights Plight of Refugees in Cameroon

UN News Service

A senior United Nations official this week sought to raise awareness of the "forgotten tragedy" of ethnic Mbororo refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR), as he stopped in Cameroon, where they are seeking refuge.

High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres was warmly received at the Mandjou and Bolembe settlements, which together are home to 3,000 refugees and are situated some 350 kilometres east of Cameroon's capital, Yaoundé.

The Mbororos are mostly nomadic cattle breeders from the west and northwest of neighbouring CAR. Those who have fled to Cameroon since 2005 said they have been targeted by rebels and others for their cattle, with women and children being kidnapped for ransom.

While at Bolembe, Mr. Guterres met Hadja Adama, 45, who fled CAR five years ago with her 11 children after her husband was killed by cattle rustlers. She is struggling to take care of her children, as well as her brother's four children after he died suddenly.

"These people have gone through an unimaginable ordeal," Mr. Guterres said at Bolembe. "And the end of the tunnel is not near because there is no sign that the security situation has improved enough for people to think about returning to the Central African Republic."

The refugees live in dozens of settlements in eastern Cameroon, making it difficult for staff from the UN refugee agency, known as UNHCR, to monitor their situation, register new arrivals and distribute relief supplies.

Following a registration exercise last October, the agency found that there has been a steady influx of Mbororo refugees, with ever greater numbers crossing the border into Cameroon.

The High Commissioner underscored that "it is a shame that such tragedy goes unnoticed. It is urgent to make the international community face its responsibilities."

Host communities face their own problems, including shortages of clean water and few classrooms.

"These are problems we are trying to solve with our limited resources," said Aida Haile Mariam, UNHCR Representative in Cameroon.

Before departing for CAR today, Mr. Guterres held talks with top officials in Cameroon, including President Paul Biya and Prime Minister Philemon Yang.