

Report # 111
BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
Central Africa
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Summary

Africa-U.S Relations

Rwanda: Gov't to Get U.S \$35 Million for Irrigation

Several foreign governments have pledged a total of \$ 35 million towards boosting the Rwandan government's agricultural irrigation program, Prime Minister Bernard Makuza has said.

Rwanda: U.S. Military Delegation Visits

A fifteen- member delegation of military officers from the US Air Force arrived in the country yesterday on a mission aimed at learning from Rwanda's institutional development. The delegation includes twelve students from the Navy, Marine and Air force segments who will be in the country on a four-day visit to add to the knowledge they acquired while in their country. They will observe positive things about Rwanda's development, very positive things in governance, rule of law and the professionalization of the army.

Burundi: United States Breaks Ground on 100th Diplomatic Facility with the New Embassy Compound in Bujumbura

The groundbreaking of the NEC in Bujumbura is the start of construction on the 100th diplomatic facility to be built by the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) since 2001. In the last nine years, OBO has completed 70 new diplomatic facilities and has moved more than 20,000 individuals into safe, secure and functional facilities. The Bureau has built 26 new facilities in Africa and the NEC in Burundi joins nine additional projects in design or under construction on the continent.

Refuges/ IDPs/ Migration

RWANDA-UGANDA: Refugees face hunger as farming ban bites

A farming ban imposed on Rwandan refugees in southwestern Uganda is raising concerns for their food security, while proposed cash transfers could boost both food prices and theft; warn aid workers and local officials, who are urging the government to withdraw the order. The situation with the Rwandan refugees remains unclear. They were stopped from cultivation so as to encourage them to voluntarily return home but the number of those who left is low.

DRC-CONGO: Insecurity hampers relief, prevents return of refugees

Insecurity and poor access are hampering efforts to address the most basic needs of more than 114,000 refugees in northern Republic of Congo. Currently there's a heavy militia and insurgent presence on the Ubangui river, which is complicating aid worker movements, because they don't know who to trust. On the river, insurgents and soldiers [from neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC] are spreading fear. The Congo government has deployed additional troops along the river to protect the refugees and humanitarian workers from armed groups active in DRC. More than 114,000 people, mostly women and children, have fled Equateur province in DRC since October 2009 because of inter-communal clashes.

Economy and Energy

Rwanda: Rwf150 Million for World Cup Expo

Kigali City Council has announced that the ongoing City World Cup festival will cost Rwf 150m. The festivities that end Sunday, March 21, are rehearsals for the World Cup expo due to take place in South Africa during the tournament. The government contributed Rwf100m. The festival whose theme, Let's celebrate our achievements, aims at evaluating the achievements of the city and the country in general for the last 16 years, and sensitizing the youth on the country's programs and what is expected of them as the future leaders of the nation.

Rwanda: High Energy Costs Hinder Mining Sector

Investors in the mining sector are complaining that high electricity tariffs are blocking the processing of minerals in Rwanda, leading to exporting raw minerals which are not attractive on the international market. The head of regulation and supervision department in the Geology department said that negotiations with government to reduce electricity costs are underway. Currently 1Kw of power is sold at Rwf 102, the investors are holding out for Rwf 28 per kilowatt.

Environment

Rwanda: Prof Maathai Urges Protection of Resources

Water experts currently meeting in Kampala, Uganda have urged governments of the region to put more resources into the protection of forests and wetlands as they play a major role in eliminating water shortage.

Politics

Rwanda: Security Council to Decide On Kabuga- Amoussouga

The decision to force Kenya to reveal the whereabouts of Felicien Kabuga, a key Genocide suspect and alleged financier of the 1994 Genocide, Speaking to reporters during the launch of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda ICTR Youth Sensitization Project in the district. ICTR had requested Kenya to produce all relevant information pertaining to the Genocide fugitive, who the court strongly believes was in the Country, but there was no satisfactory level of cooperation. The ICTR has indicted 92 people for their alleged role in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi that claimed over 1 million people, 85 of these have been arrested while 11 still remain at large. The key challenge that we face is the apprehension of the remaining 11 suspects who are still at large and have been indicted by the ICTR.

Rwanda: Unite Citizens, Religious Leaders Urged

Religious leaders play a leading role in promoting unity in society. Remarks were made during a two-day workshop organized by CNLG in partnership with the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC). He added that the country was deeply torn apart during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and survivors need a message of hope.

Religion is a unifying factor that Rwandans can find as a common ground since many survivors go to the same church with those who killed their loved ones. The Mufti of Rwanda, Sheikh Saleh Habimana, welcomed the idea of various religious groups working together to unify the country. "We should take part in helping people who still live with the trauma left behind by the Genocide," Habimana said.

Rwanda: Constitutional Amendment Back in Parliament

Following its approval by the conference of chairpersons of parliamentary commissions, the amendment of the constitution yesterday went back to the House for a final adoption. Some of the new introductions in the law include the authentic interpretation of law that will be done by the Supreme Court unlike the previous arrangement where it was done by the Parliament. The current constitution has so far been amended three times since its official adoption in 2003.

Pan Africa

Rwanda: Kagame to Attend Pan African Media Summit

President Paul Kagame is set to attend a landmark Pan- Africa media conference that begins at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre in Nairobi, Kenya. The two-day summit which brings together delegates from across the continent has been organized to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Nation Media Group (NMG), East Africa's biggest mass media group. According to the program, the three delegates will discuss how political leaders, the media and civil society can collaborate to solve the big issues confronting Africa in the 21st Century.

Rwanda: Kabuga Not in Kenya, Says Country

Genocide fugitive Felicien Kabuga is unlikely to be hiding in Kenya, Rwanda's Foreign minister has said. Minister Louise Mushikiwabo said her country believed Kenya's word that Kabuga, Africa's most wanted fugitive, was not in the country. The US and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda have maintained that the Kenyan Government is harboring Kabuga.

Rwanda: Regional Meet Tackles Infrastructure Challenges

Africa needs to develop efficient public infrastructure if it is to ease the cost of doing business. It was said diagnostic studies have revealed that the poor infrastructure on the continent increases the cost of doing business by 40 percent in landlocked countries. The two day meeting has gathered UN agencies, Ministers of regional integration, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Civil Society. Rwanda's Minister of Eastern African Affairs highlighted the benefits of regional integration which include, trade creation among member states, greater economies of scale, increased investment, free movements of resources and improved bargaining power.

Peace keeping/ Conflict Resolution and Security matters

Eradicating arms trafficking will further peace in Central Africa, say UN officials

The efforts of Central African nations to consolidate peace and further development are being thwarted by weapons trafficking, top United Nations officials warned today, calling on Member States to do all they can to eradicate this scourge. Central Africa is awash with illicit weapons exacerbating inter-communal violence, increasing cross-border crime and threatening ongoing peace and national reconciliation processes, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said in her remarks to a debate in the Security Council. Peace and security in Central Africa require a strong commitment by States in the sub-region

together with State suppliers of weapons to expand their individual and collective efforts to eradicate weapons trafficking.

Military/ Rebels/ Terrorism/ War on Terror

Congo Official Says FRF Rebel Group Blackmailing Government

The leader of the Federal Republican Forces (FRF) rebel group in the Democratic Republic of Congo says his group will continue its offensive against the national army after accusing the national army of attacking FRF positions. They say, "We have so many problems... we have no development, we have no roads, we have no hospitals, we have no schools and we have many insecurities in eastern Congo. We want to sit around the table and to discuss about that problem. If we finished the discussion, we will enter into the government forces," General Venant Bisogo said the rebels' objective is to force President Joseph Kabila's government to resolve problems, including underdevelopment in eastern Congo after what he claims to be years of neglect.

UN tribunal renders judgments in appeals by two convicted Rwandans

A United Nations tribunal today affirmed the conviction and 15-year sentence of a famous Rwandan singer and composer for his role during the mass killings that engulfed the country in 1994, and reduced the sentence handed down against a top official after reversing a number of his convictions. Simon Bikindi, a former singer, composer and leader of a ballet troupe, was found guilty by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda ([ICTR](#)) in 2008 of a single count of direct and public incitement to commit genocide based on public exhortations to kill Tutsis, which he made on the Kivumu-Kayove road in Gisenyi prefecture in late June 1994.

19 reported killed in DR Congo attacks

At least 11 civilians and eight troops have died in attacks by Ugandan LRA rebels in the northeast of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a local association said. The attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army rebels took place between March 11 and 14 in Bangadi, Duru and Dungu in Orientale province about 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of the border with the Central African Republic.

Elections and Governness

Bozizé candidate in Central African elections

François Bozizé, President of the Central African Republic, has announced his candidacy at the upcoming 25 April presidential elections. Several opposition groups have already announced they will boycott the polls. The incumbent, speaking yesterday at the Barthélémy Boganda stadium in the capital, Bangui, announced he had accepted to stand for re-election, representing the Kwa na Kwa labour party founded by himself in August 2009. President Bozizé in February decreed that the impoverished nation were to hold

elections on 25 April The incumbent seized power in Bangui through a military coup in March 2003. Two years later, he was elected President, gaining 43 percent in the first round of the popular vote in a poll that has been described as relatively free and fair. In the second poll round, he won over former PM Martin Ziguélé with 64 percent of the vote. Several minor opposition parties in the Central African Republic already in February announced they would boycott this year's presidential elections.

Election dates finally set for São Tomé

President Fradique de Menezes of São Tomé and Príncipe has decreed that local and legislative elections will be held in July and August, after government had been unable to follow the original election schedule. Elections to the São Toméan parliament were originally slated for February this year. They were later rescheduled for April, and finally indefinitely postponed. The archipelago's President yesterday finally made a decision when the delayed polls were to take place, São Toméan media report today. In a decree issued in the presidential palace, President Menezes says "the implementation of regional and municipal elections is scheduled for 25 July 2010."

Gabon opposition warns of coup

The runner-up to Gabon's 2009 presidential polls this week warned that the "general discontent" with President Ali Bongo within the year could lead to "Niger-like coup." Government officials see the statement as a serious threat. Mr Mba Obame was an independent candidate at the August 2009 presidential elections in Gabon, where he polled second with 26 percent of the votes, is one of the key figures in the newly founded opposition party.

Gabon's Ali Bongo now also party chief

President Ali Bongo of Gabon, who "inherited" the presidency from his father in 2009, now also followed late Omar Bongo's footsteps as freshly elected leader of the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG). The PDG has been in power since its establishment. According to a statement issued by the party, "the former Vice-President of the PDG, the Head of State and President of the Republic, has been unanimously elected President of the PDG, according to the internal rules of this political entity Since the death of the current President's father, President Omar Bongo, in June 2009, the party has had an interim leader. Since the ascension of Mr Bongo jr to the Gabonese presidency, it has been clear he would be elected the party's leader. But immediately after his father's death, this was still not clear. Ali Bongo, thus Defence Minister, was unpopular within party ranks, according to many reports from Gabon at the time. His playboy past had somewhat discredited him and many party members felt it was time for new leaders from outside the Bongo family.

Details

Africa-U.S Relations

Rwanda: Gov't to Get U.S.\$35 Million for Irrigation

The New Times

Kigali — several foreign governments have pledged a total of \$ 35 million towards boosting the Rwandan government's agricultural irrigation program, Prime Minister Bernard Makuza has said.

Makuza and three other ministers had been summoned by parliament to shed light on some outstanding issues.

"We are making good progress with irrigation and different partners including USAID and Canada have pledged a total of \$ 35 million towards that venture," he said

In 2007, the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources inaugurated a similar irrigation project in Bugesera District, Eastern Province to the tune of Frw10.3 billion.

The money will boost agricultural production through the use of new irrigation technologies and will focus on the rehabilitation of hillsides to ensure that good terracing mechanisms are put in place.

Makuza told members of the lower chamber on Tuesday that the government was doing everything possible to improve on the agricultural sector, which still pioneers as the nation's premium source of income.

"We have sometimes put our focus on one sector and overlooked the others and yet all sectors complement each other in promoting development. We are currently doing everything possible to see that the agriculture sector improves," the Prime Minister said.

Rwanda: U.S. Military Delegation Visits

The New Times

Kigali — A fifteen- member delegation of military officers from the US Air Force arrived in the country yesterday on a mission aimed at learning from Rwanda's institutional development.

The delegation includes twelve students from the Navy, Marine and Air force segments who will be in the country on a four-day visit to add to the knowledge they acquired while in their country.

The Commander of US Air Force College, Major General Robert Kane, told The New Times yesterday, that the students would get first-hand information on the many success stories they have heard about Rwanda.

"We have heard so many positive things about Rwanda's development, very positive things in governance, rule of law and the professionalization of the army. These students will see that first-hand here," he said shortly after their arrival at Kigali International Airport.

The students, Kane added, would particularly look at aspects they studied like; diplomacy, politics, economics and culture.

"They will learn how all those things relate in this part of the world. They will meet with government officials, visit economic and cultural places to learn more," he said.

The students' leader, Lt Colonel Preston Jonas, said, "We have had a wonderful moment to read about Rwanda - this is an opportunity for us to see first-hand these things."

Shortly after their arrival, the delegation proceeded to the Kigali Memorial Site where Major General Kane laid a wreath on the mass graves of victims of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

They are scheduled to meet the Rwanda Defence Forces (RDF) Chief of General Staff, Gen James Kabarebe, today at the Ministry of Defence headquarters.

Burundi: United States Breaks Ground on 100th Diplomatic Facility with the New Embassy Compound in Bujumbura

United States Department of State (Washington, DC)

U.S. Ambassador to Burundi Pamela J. H. Slutz; Mayor of Bujumbura Mr. Evarard Giswaswa; and Acting Managing Director for Operations of the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations John Finnegan, Jr. broke ground on the Bujumbura New Embassy Compound (NEC) in Burundi today.

The groundbreaking of the NEC in Bujumbura is the start of construction on the 100th diplomatic facility to be built by the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) since 2001. In the last nine years, OBO has completed 70 new diplomatic facilities and has moved more than 20,000 individuals into safe, secure and functional facilities. The Bureau has built 26 new facilities in Africa and the NEC in Burundi joins nine additional projects in design or under construction on the continent.

The Bujumbura NEC will provide a secure, safe, and functional facility for approximately 320 embassy employees. The NEC will consist of seven buildings including a chancery, Marine Security Guard Quarters, a support annex with maintenance shops, a utility building, and three compound access control structures.

The site's landscaping creates a unified environment for its seven buildings – demonstrating the U.S. Government's commitment to green design and sustainability as well as excellence in architecture. The compound's design incorporates rain water harvesting and photovoltaic panels to achieve a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver rating.

Caddell Construction of Montgomery, Alabama will construct the NEC. The approximate cost of the entire project is \$137 million. The architectural firm of Einhorn Yaffee Prescott of Albany, New York designed the compound. The proposed completion date for the NEC is 2012. Approximately 500 workers will be involved in the construction of the NEC.

The construction of the NEC in Bujumbura reflects the importance of the bilateral relationship between the United States and Burundi, and emphasizes the commitment of the United States to remain engaged with the Burundian people as they strive to build a peaceful and democratic society.

Refuges/ IDPs/ Migration

RWANDA-UGANDA: Refugees face hunger as farming ban bites

IRIN

NAKIVALE, 18 March 2010 (IRIN) - A farming ban imposed on Rwandan refugees in southwestern Uganda is raising concerns for their food security, while proposed cash transfers could boost both food prices and theft, warn aid workers and local officials, who are urging the government to rescind the directive.

"The situation with the Rwandan refugees remains unclear. They were stopped from cultivation so as to encourage them to voluntarily return home but the number of those who left is low," Festo Wafuta, the senior Ugandan official in the Nakivale camp, told IRIN. "As yet we do not have a clear solution from the government about the Rwandans; right now most of them are relying on food distributed by WFP [UN World Food Programme]."

The Rwandan refugees were last year given until August to voluntarily repatriate but only 5,000 left, while the remaining 16,000 went to live with nationals near the settlements but returned to the camps once the repatriation period ended.

"The food situation only got out of hand late last year when we had riots here at Nakivale; those who rioted were mostly the new refugees who had not cultivated their land; we hope the food distributions will continue until April when [WFP] cash transfers are expected to begin," Wafuta said.

He said government officials had recommended WFP continue supporting the refugees by distributing full rations to them.

"Without the food distributions, we run the risk of extreme hunger among some of the refugees, increased cases of robbery as well as increased hunting in the nearby national park," Wafuta said. "If this directive were rescinded, then life for the Rwandan refugees would greatly improve."

“Not a holiday camp”

Government Minister for Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Refugees, Tarsis Kabwegyere, said the ban on cultivation would not be lifted soon, adding that “if the refugees insist, we shall chase them or they can contact UNHCR [the UN Refugee Agency] so that they are relocated elsewhere.

“This is the government position. UNHCR knows about it and they should arrange with the refugees and take them to another country. This is not a holiday camp. These people were told that the conditions [in Rwanda] were conducive for them to go back home,” Kabwegyere told IRIN by telephone.

According to UNHCR, the refugee status of many Rwandans in Uganda may be lifted by the end of 2011, but only after various conditions have been met.

Cash caution

Stanlake Samkange, WFP country director for Uganda, said plans were under way to start a cash transfer system in April to help Rwandan refugees improve their livelihoods.

However, local officials in Nakivale said with a cash transfer food prices could rise dramatically as vendors will know the refugees have money.

Wafuta said: "This could also trigger an increase in incidents of robbery and house breakages as people look for the money the refugees will have received.

“We are also concerned about the refugees who sell the food they have produced; our efforts to regulate this have not achieved much. This has resulted in some refugees selling all their produce and in cases where the head of the house indulges in alcohol, the result could be hunger for the children and may also contribute to an increase in sexual and gender-based violence.”

"We can't go back"

Most of the Rwandan refugees are ethnic Hutus. They said they feared returning home because of "hostility", insecurity and persecution by their neighbours and government officials who consider them to have been involved in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Glodetta Uwilingiye, 36, mother of five in the Kyaka II settlement, formerly from Byumba region in Rwanda, said: "I can't go back because there is no just law in Rwanda; my husband died in 2002. Who will guarantee my security if I return home yet my neighbours are suspicious of me?"

Since the farming ban was issued, she said, life had become harder and she was having problems keeping two of her children in school.

"I make about 1,000 [Uganda] shillings [\$0.50] whenever I go out to do petty jobs for Ugandans or the Congolese refugees. This is not enough to buy food and pens and books for my children; they have had to stay home recently as I try to make more money," Uwilingiye said.

David Mugenyi, commandant of the Kyaka II settlement, said Rwandan refugees

considered extremely vulnerable, such as widows, single parents, the disabled and child-headed households, were being considered for assistance as the government reviews the non-cultivation directive.

"We are human and we know that some of these refugees are living in difficult conditions, so we assist whenever we can," he said.

In the capital, Kampala, UNHCR said the government had agreed to revisit the decision barring Rwandan refugees from cultivating the land.

DRC-CONGO: Insecurity hampers relief, prevents return of refugees

(IRIN)

Most fled the fighting with little more than the clothes on their backs. Now, insecurity and poor access are hampering efforts to address the most basic needs of more than 114,000 refugees in northern Republic of Congo.

"Currently there's a heavy militia and insurgent presence on the Ubangui river, which is complicating aid worker movements, because you don't know who to trust," Daniel Roger Tam, of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) told IRIN in Impfondo, 900km north of Brazzaville and capital of Likouala department, among the poorest and least-developed regions in the country.

"On the river, insurgents and soldiers [from neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC] are spreading fear. For weeks, our boats have been stuck in [the riverside town of] Bétou because of the insecurity," said Jonathan Balou, another UNCHR official.

According to a local government official in Impfondo: "From time to time, DRC soldiers come to our side of the river to, as they put it, pursue the insurgents. You can see them on the river and some fishermen have stopped fishing as a result."

Bétou sub-prefect Col Jean-Dominique Engamba told IRIN the situation was no better on the other side of the river. "Some people who sought refuge with us, having thought things had calmed down, tried to leave again either to retrieve some of their belongings or to see if their fields have been ruined. But they were simply sent back by soldiers controlling Dongo [the epicentre of the crisis in DRC's Equateur Province]. The soldiers prefer the villages empty so they can get down to plundering them," he said.

The Congo government has deployed additional troops along the river to protect the refugees and humanitarian workers from armed groups active in DRC. More than 114,000 people, mostly women and children, have fled Equateur province in DRC since October 2009 because of inter-communal clashes.

However, despite this deployment, insecurity on parts of the river has left some refugee

sites beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance.

The influx has almost doubled the overall population of Likouala, where social services such as medical centres, schools and markets, barely even meet the needs of the host population.

“We don’t have sufficient resources to conduct the relief operation and complete it on schedule,” said Tam.

The refugees are now located at around 100 sites dotted along a 500km stretch of the Ubangui, which marks the border between the two Congos.

“Their needs range across the whole spectrum of basic services, such as protection, food, health, non-food items, clean water and sanitation, livelihood support and education,” according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNHCR, which have jointly appealed for US\$60m to help the refugees.

“These needs persist due to the fact that the social service structures in the zones where refugees settled have either been overwhelmed by the inflow of refugees, or simply never existed to begin with,” states the appeal document. “A robust response is needed to prevent a full-blown crisis.”

Aid workers face various logistical constraints. Without roads, the Ubangui is the main access route to the refugees, but many boats are in disrepair and fuel is scarce and costly. In addition, the river’s waters are so low now that only small craft can navigate it. While one WFP barge laden with relief supplies made it from Brazzaville to the Likouala town of Ndjoundou, another was grounded downstream. In an effort to overcome these logistical setbacks, WFP has begun to airlift supplies to the north.

Dire conditions

Despite a mass vaccination campaign in Likouala and significant deliveries of food and non-food items - such as plastic sheeting for shelter, sleeping mats, blankets, kitchen sets, jerry cans, buckets and mosquito nets - conditions for most of the refugees are dire.

“Once, WFP brought us some peas, a little salt and rice. Our food stocks have been depleted for a long time now. Cassava leaves have become our daily meal,” Jonas Babomba Mango, a refugee supervisor in the Likouala town of Bétou, told IRIN.

Most of the refugees fled before harvest time so food stocks in Congo are depleted. Prices of staples in urban markets doubled between September and November 2009. Previously vibrant food trade on the river has been suspended. Lack of nets and the river’s low water level make it hard to fish.

Cases of malnutrition have been recorded among children. “Although they have diminished, these malnutrition cases persist,” said Philippe Pebila, a nurse working with

the NGO Médecins d'Afrique in Gnamoba, upstream from Bétou.

“We have a big problem with sexually transmitted infections, which account for 10-30 percent of external consultations,” said Hervé le Guillouzic, a UNHCR health official.

Aid workers are also worried about access to clean water. “Refugees use the river for drinking, washing, and defecating. The swelling of the population has considerably increased the risk of water contamination,” noted the OCHA/UNCHR appeal, which pointed out that about two-thirds of refugee sites lacked wells.

Economy and Energy

Rwanda: Rwf150 Million for World Cup Expo

The New Times

Kigali — Kigali City Council has announced that the ongoing City World Cup festival will cost Rwf 150m.

The festivities that end Sunday, March 21, at Amahoro stadium, are rehearsals for the World Cup expo due to take place in South Africa during the tournament.

Speaking during a press conference on Thursday, City Mayor, Aisa Kirabo Kacyira, said that the budget has been catered for by the government, Kigali City and the private sector.

The government contributed Rwf100m

The festival whose theme, Let's celebrate our achievements, aims at evaluating the achievements of the city and the country in general for the last 16 years, and sensitizing the youth on the country's programs and what is expected of them as the future leaders of the nation.

The funds will also help in organising the pre-World Cup activities that include showcasing Rwanda's products to be displayed in the World Cup host cities of Durban and Tshwane, in what has been dubbed 'Rwanda Village'.

Others events scheduled to take place include awarding teams that took part in the Mayor's Cup tournament and a friendly match between Durban and Kigali youths in a "Mini- World Cup" in Kigali.

Kirabo said that the Rwanda Village, an illustration of Rwanda's rich culture, achievements and products to be showcased in South Africa, will be inaugurated at the closing ceremony.

"Rwandans will have a chance to publicly see what we intend to showcase in South Africa," Kirabo said.

The Sunday event will be attended by the Mayors of all East African countries and the South African cities of Durban, Johannesburg and Tshwane.

"We invited the Mayors of the East African capital cities to celebrate with them the achievements as a community," Kirabo said

Alphonse Nizeyimana, the vice Mayor in charge of Finance and Economic Development, said that Rwanda's showcasing during World Cup will help attract investors to the county.

Rwanda: High Energy Costs Hinder Mining Sector

The New Times

Kigali — Investors in the mining sector are complaining that high electricity tariffs are blocking the processing of minerals in Rwanda, leading to exporting raw minerals which are not attractive on the international market.

Speaking to The New Times yesterday, Dominic Bidega, the head of regulation and supervision department in the Geology department said that negotiations with government to reduce electricity costs are underway.

Currently 1Kw of power is sold at Rwf 102, the investors are holding out for Rwf 28 per kilowatt.

"From the assessment we have done, there is capacity to set up industries that would process minerals in Rwanda, but electricity costs are still a challenge," Bidega said in an interview.

Janet Mutesi, the Managing Partner of Pyramid Mining Company, told The New Times that the already existing mining companies in Rwanda have the capacity to process mineral products but can't afford the electricity needed.

"We would add value to minerals and this would contribute to high revenue, but electricity costs stopped us," Mutesi said.

Environment

Rwanda: Prof Maathai Urges Protection of Resources

The New Times

Kigali — Water experts currently meeting in Kampala, Uganda have urged governments of the region to put more resources into the protection of forests and wetlands as they play a major role in eliminating water shortage.

In an exclusive interview with The New Times, 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Professor Wangari Maathai, said that unless regional governments focus on educating the masses about the significance of natural resources, Africa will continue to suffer.

"It is absolutely important for African governments and civil society organizations, particularly in East Africa, to embark on educational process to let East Africans know the significant role forests, wetlands and swamps play in water conservation.

"One of the most effective strategies to ensure that there is water in this region is to protect natural forest ecosystem, watersheds, wetlands and rivers. If citizens do not understand these ecosystems, they will not protect them" Prof Maathai said.

She added that local communities and governments should not wait for the international community to initiate activities or bring money for activities to start.

"Whether money is provided or not, the leadership is responsible for the survival of its people. Africa, more especially East Africa needs, to seek solutions to their problems from their experiences rather than continue to borrow donations from others or to wait to be told what to do.

"The population should also be concerned but it is really the actions leaders take individually and collectively that will make the difference," she noted.

Politics

Rwanda: Security Council to Decide On Kabuga- Amoussouga

The New Times

Kigali — The decision to force Kenya to reveal the whereabouts of Felicien Kabuga, a key Genocide suspect and alleged financier of the 1994 Genocide, solely rests with the Security Council, Roland Amoussouga, the Senior Legal Advisor, Chief External Relations and Strategic Planning and Spokesman of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), has said.

Speaking to reporters during the launch of the ICTR Youth Sensitization Project in the district on Thursday, Amoussouga said that the ICTR had requested Kenya to produce all relevant information pertaining to the Genocide fugitive, who the court strongly believes was in the Country, but there was no satisfactory level of cooperation.

"In June and December last year, the Prosecutor and the President of the Tribunal made a presentation before the Security Council and reported that there was no satisfying level of cooperation given to the ICTR by Kenya on the issue of Kabuga," said Amoussouga.

"The Prosecutor was asking the Kenyan government to produce all the relevant information on the exit of Kabuga from Kenya because it alleged that Kabuga had left the country. So the Prosecutor simply asked Kenya to give him the information on when and how Kabuga left and where he went.

"Those answers were never forthcoming and the Prosecutor reported back to the Security Council in December and is still waiting for Kenya to come clean," he added.

Amoussouga said that the last possible stage was for the Prosecutor of the ICTR requesting through the voice of the Presidency of the ICTR, for a special resolution to be taken against Kenya.

"It is only the Security Council that is empowered to take coercive measures to compel Kenya to cooperate as the ICTR Prosecutor is asking them. We haven't yet reached that stage, but it will not be impossible to contemplate such a stage on the part of the Prosecutor and the Presidency of the ICTR during investigations of the Security Council on the issue of Kabuga," he said.

The ICTR has indicted 92 people for their alleged role in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi that claimed over 1 million people, 85 of these have been arrested while 11 still remain at large.

"The key challenge that we face is the apprehension of the remaining 11 suspects who are still at large and have been indicted by the ICTR," said Amoussouga.

"It is our hope that member states will cooperate with us so that we can arrest them and try them during the tenure of ICTR's mandate. But in the event that we do not get them, we remain committed to put in place a mechanism that will take care of all this".

Rwanda: Unite Citizens, Religious Leaders Urged

The New Times

Kigali — Religious leaders play a leading role in promoting unity in society, Pastor Antoine Rutayisire, the Vice President of The National Commission for Genocide (CNLG) has said.

He made the remarks during a two-day workshop organized by CNLG in partnership with the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) at a Kigali Hotel on Thursday.

He added that the country was deeply torn apart during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and survivors need a message of hope.

"We have to unite all Rwandans and preach the message of unity and forgiveness between survivors and those who wronged them," Rutayisire said.

"Religion is a unifying factor that Rwandans can find as a common ground since many survivors go to the same church with those who killed their loved ones," Rutayisire said.

He added that religious leaders have completely changed and will never go back to the poor ideology that fueled seeds of divisionism among Rwandans.

"We castigate that divisionism ideology of the past and we are committed in promoting unity among our people," Rutayisiye added.

The Mufti of Rwanda, Sheikh Saleh Habimana, welcomed the idea of various religious groups working together to unify the country.

"We should take part in helping people who still live with the trauma left behind by the Genocide," Habimana said.

During the workshop, a documentary was screened, showing the work that CNLG and NURC had done to help genocide survivors reconcile with people who killed the families.

Rwanda: Constitutional Amendment Back in Parliament

The New Times

Kigali — Following its approval by the conference of chairpersons of parliamentary commissions, the amendment of the constitution yesterday went back to the House for a final adoption.

Presenting a report on the amendments, deputy Speaker of Parliament in charge of political affairs, Denis Polisi, said that the changes on the law aimed at merging all three previous amendments.

"the new law now has ten titles, 19 chapters and 192 articles," he said, adding that the conference of chairpersons sat 14 days consecutively to work on the amendments.

Some of the new introductions in the law include the authentic interpretation of law that will be done by the Supreme Court unlike the previous arrangement where it was done by the Parliament.

"In common law, the interpretation of law is done by the court and it's this system that we adopted. However, the Supreme Court can decide to consult the parliament in case there is a need," said Polisi.

In an interview with Speaker Rose Mukantabana, she said that one of the reasons for the amendments was to make it open and accommodative.

"The constitution was so precise that every time there was need to make changes in some areas, it required first amending the constitution which was not proper and time consuming. We are changing it in a way that there won't be need to amend it frequently," she said.

The current constitution has so far been amended three times since its official adoption in 2003.

"The constitution obliged many laws to go through the Senate before they are officially approved; in this case, the new amendments reduce the number of laws that pass through the Senate.

"The current constitution has an option of allowing as many organic laws as possible, we have changed that, only the organic laws that are mentioned in the constitution are allowed," she said.

She, however, added that the amendment did not require a referendum since it did not tackle the fundamental principles.

Article 193 of the current constitution indicates that if the constitutional amendment concerns the term of the President of the Republic or the system of democratic

government based on political pluralism, or the constitutional regime established by this Constitution, especially the republican form of the government or national sovereignty.

Pan Africa

Rwanda: Kagame to Attend Pan African Media Summit

The New Times

Kigali — President Paul Kagame, is set to attend a landmark Pan- Africa media conference that begins tomorrow at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre in Nairobi, Kenya.

The two-day summit which brings together delegates from across the continent has been organized to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Nation Media Group (NMG), East Africa's biggest mass media group.

Kagame, together with the former President of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, and Kenya's Prime Minister, Raila Odinga will feature on the 1st Eminent Persons' roundtable session which seeks to expand political participation.

According to the program, the three delegates will discuss how political leaders, the media and civil society can collaborate to solve the big issues confronting Africa in the 21st Century.

"It is confirmed that the President will attend this conference and speak at one of the roundtables during the two-day conference," an official in the Office of the President, told The New Times.

Under the theme, "Media and African Promise' - Reflections on the past, present and prospects for the future," the summit will also tackle other topics such as beyond political leadership and how Africa has been shaped by its image in local and international media.

The delegates will also discuss the alternative perspectives of governance and democracy.

Other guests that will attend the conference include, former Mozambique President, Joaquim Alberto Chissano, Achim Steiner, acting on the nomination of Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Louise Mushikiwabo, among others.

NMG has organized the conference in partnership with Africa Media Initiative in a bid to share ideas on what the future holds for African media.

Over 600 delegates from Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa, United Kingdom, Ghana, Nigeria and Malawi have already registered for the summit dubbed the decade's most important media conference.

Rwanda: Kabuga Not in Kenya, Says Country

The New Times

Nairobi — Genocide fugitive Felicien Kabuga is unlikely to be hiding in Kenya, Rwanda's Foreign minister has said.

Minister Louise Mushikiwabo said on Wednesday her country believed Kenya's word that Kabuga, Africa's most wanted fugitive, was not in the country.

"Felicien Kabuga is the man who financed the genocide. We have no idea where he is. It has been said he has been living in Kenya but the administration has assured he is not around," Foreign Affairs Ms Mushikiwabo said.

In an interview with the Nation ahead of Thursday's Pan African Media Conference, the minister said there was no reason why Kenya, as Rwanda's neighbour "could harbour such a person."

The US and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda have maintained that the Kenyan Government is harboring Kabuga.

Last month, US ambassador-at-large for War Crimes Stephen Rapp said Kabuga was in Kenya despite the government's declarations to the contrary.

The fugitive is at the top of a list of 11 genocide suspects sought by the ICTR, with a \$5 million (Sh390 million) bounty on his head.

He has been on the run since his indictment for his role in the 1994 Rwandan genocide that claimed over 800,000 lives. The Kenyan Government has repeatedly denied claims that Kabuga, whose bank accounts have been frozen, is in the country.

In 1998, an ICTR team raided a Nairobi house and allegedly found a note indicating that the fugitive, who escaped arrest, had been tipped off by police.

On Wednesday, Ms Mushikiwabo said the ICTR could be using claims that Mr Kabuga was in Kenya so that it can continue operating. "If he is here, where is he?" she asked.

Fielding questions from reporters, the minister said any country hosting Kabuga should collaborate in handing him over and expressed hope he "will show up somewhere one of these days and face trial".

Rwanda: Regional Meet Tackles Infrastructure Challenges

The New Times

Kigali — Africa needs to develop efficient public infrastructure if it is to ease the cost of doing business, Rwanda's Minister for East African Affairs, Monique Mukaruriza, has said.

She said that diagnostic studies have revealed that the poor infrastructure on the continent increases the cost of doing business by 40 percent in landlocked countries.

"I am dwelling on infrastructure because it clearly demonstrates the need for us to achieve cost efficiencies and become competitive in today's globalised world," she said.

Mukaruriza made the remarks yesterday at Kigali Serena Hotel during the opening ceremony of the meeting on Regional Integration.

The two day meeting has gathered UN agencies, Ministers of regional integration, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Civil Society.

She noted that the cost of business is dependent not only on quality and efficiency of infrastructure in the country, but that of the neighboring countries too.

Rwanda's domestic goods and services also depend on roads, rail and ports in the neighboring countries, the minister said.

She highlighted the benefits of regional integration which include, trade creation among member states, greater economies of scale, increased investment, free movements of resources and improved bargaining power.

In his remarks Amb. Eugene Munyakayanza, representing Rwanda's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation said that in sub-Saharan Africa, the average time to get a container of products to a ship is said to be forty eight days.

"Preparation for export involves 11 documents, seventeen visits to different offices, twenty nine signatures and sixty days to move goods from the factory to the ship."

Munyakayanza urged that in order to change this disabling situation, Africa urgently needs to adopt a different mindset and effect corrective measures.

The Deputy Executive secretary for Economic Commission for Africa , Lalla Ben Barka, said the high level meeting is timely because it will consider the operational framework for an Eastern and Southern Africa sub-regional coordination mechanism(SRCM), taking into account the realities and priorities of respective sub-regions.

"One major characteristics in the international arena over the last decade has been the pace at which the world economy is globalizing," she said.

She urged that an integrated continental market remains Africa's best hope for strengthening its manufacturing sector therefore diversifying its economy, enhancing employment and reducing poverty.

Some of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) represented include, the East African Community (EAC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

They also include the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and the Community of Sahel-Saharan Countries(CEN_SAD).

Peace keeping/ Conflict Resolution and Security matters

Eradicating arms trafficking will further peace in Central Africa, say UN officials

UN News Service

The efforts of Central African nations to consolidate peace and further development are being thwarted by weapons trafficking, top United Nations officials warned today, calling on Member States to do all they can to eradicate this scourge.

“Central Africa is awash with illicit weapons – exacerbating inter-communal violence, increasing cross-border crime and threatening ongoing peace and national reconciliation processes,” Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said in her remarks to a debate in the Security Council.

“Peace and security in Central Africa require a strong commitment by States in the sub-region together with State suppliers of weapons to expand their individual and collective efforts to eradicate weapons trafficking,” she stated.

Such efforts, Ms. Migiro added, must include greater commitment by the States of the sub-region to implement global instruments and to strengthen their capacity to identify and combat those involved in illicit brokering activities.

These instruments include the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects; the UN Firearms Protocol; and the International Tracing Instrument.

In addition, Central African States should make the best possible use of tools and expertise made available by the world body, including from the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs and the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, she said.

The head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (**UNODC**) noted that today’s conflicts take place within rather than between nations, and are fought with light rather than heavy weapons. The global illicit arms trade is estimated to be worth \$200-\$300 million annually, and Africa, the most profitable market for smugglers, suffers the largest number of casualties because of it.

“Even small amounts of arms can undermine the socio-economic progress of a nation, break the State’s monopoly on the use of force, or create a tipping point in political in political (or military) stalemates,” said UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa.

“In short, illicit arms fuel the violence that undermines security, development and justice,” he added, stressing the need to tackle both the demand and supply of illicit arms.

“Arms trafficking is another pandemic. The therapy is known, the surgical instruments available. I hope this meeting will spur Member States to use these tools to cut the arms flows that fuel conflicts, undermine States and enrich criminals.”

The Council, in a presidential statement, encouraged Member States to “undertake vigorous actions aimed at restricting the supply of SALW [small arms and light weapons] and ammunitions to areas of instability in Central Africa.”

Among other things, the 15-member body also called on international partners to assist countries in the region to strengthen their capacities to prevent the illicit proliferation of such weapons, and to take measures related to the security and management of stockpiles of arms.

Military/ Rebels/ Terrorism/ War on Terror

Congo Official Says FRF Rebel Group Blackmailing Government

VOA

The leader of the Federal Republican Forces (FRF) rebel group in the Democratic Republic of Congo says his group will continue its offensive against the national army after accusing the national army of attacking FRF positions.

“We have so many problems... we have no development, we have no roads, we have no hospitals, we have no schools and we have many insecurities in eastern Congo. We want to sit around the table and to discuss about that problem. If we finished the discussion, we will enter into the government forces,”

The leader of the Federal Republican Forces (FRF) rebel group in the Democratic Republic of Congo says his group will continue its offensive against the national army after accusing the national army of attacking FRF positions.

General Venant Bisogo said the rebels’ objective is to force President Joseph Kabila’s government to resolve problems, including underdevelopment in eastern Congo after what he claims to be years of neglect.

“We had a meeting, a conference in Goma (and) we asked many things and government accepted... (but) now government refused to give us the solution about many problems that we have in eastern Congo after two years,” Bisogo said.

The rebel group has often refused to hand over their weapons despite the government’s ultimatum demanding Minembwe, a town in South Kivu be an independent territory. Bisogo said the government has failed to develop eastern Congo.

“We have so many problems... we have no development, we have no roads, we have no hospitals, we have no schools and we have many insecurities in eastern Congo. We want to sit around the table and to discuss about that problem. If we finished the discussion, we will enter into the government forces,” Bisogo said.

The rebels accused the government of excluding them in previous peace accords -- a charge the government has denied.

In 2009 a Belgian researcher claimed Rwanda supplied arms to the FRF rebel group shortly after President Paul Kagame told Congo’s President Kabila that his government would not be a source of instability for Congo -- allegation Kigali has sharply denied. Analysts say the FRF rebel group was formed as an anti-Rwanda political movement funded by Congolese Tutsis.

Information minister Lambert Mende said the administration will not allow the rebels to undermine the government’s mandate.

“He claims to fight for being appointed as cabinet minister. This is blackmail. Our policy has been these last years to strictly reject any political claim backed on blackmail. Because when you say yes to such blackmail from criminal elements like those, it is not the right way to the rule of law in our country and we won’t follow that way,” Mende said.

UN tribunal renders judgments in appeals by two convicted Rwandans

UN News Service

A United Nations tribunal today affirmed the conviction and 15-year sentence of a famous Rwandan singer and composer for his role during the mass killings that engulfed the country in 1994, and reduced the sentence handed down against a top official after reversing a number of his convictions.

Simon Bikindi, a former singer, composer and leader of a ballet troupe, was found guilty by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda ([ICTR](#)) in 2008 of a single count of direct and public incitement to commit genocide based on public exhortations to kill Tutsis, which he made on the Kivumu-Kayove road in Gisenyi prefecture in late June 1994.

More than 800,000 people were massacred in Rwanda, mostly by machete, for being ethnic Tutsis or Hutu moderates during a period of less than 100 days starting in April 1994.

The Appeals Chamber of the Tribunal, which is based in the Tanzanian city of Arusha, today dismissed the appeals of both Mr. Bikindi and the Prosecution and affirmed his conviction and sentence of 15 years in prison.

The Appeals Chamber also reversed a number of convictions of Simèon Nchamihigo, a former deputy prosecutor in Cyangugu Prefecture, and reduced his sentence to 40 years instead of life imprisonment.

Reversed today was Mr. Nchamihigo’s convictions for genocide and murder as a crime against humanity for aiding and abetting the killing of Joséphine Mukashema, Héléne and Marie, as well as his conviction for genocide in relation to instigating the killings of refugees taken from Kamarampaka stadium on 16 April 1994 and for instigating the killings at Shangi parish and Hanika parish.

The court further reversed his convictions for genocide and extermination as a crime against humanity in relation to instigating the massacre at Mibilizi parish and hospital and the massacre at Nyakanyinya school.

Both men will remain in the UN Detention Facility in Arusha pending their transfer to the countries in which they will serve their sentence.

19 reported killed in DR Congo attacks

France 24

At least 11 civilians and eight troops have died in attacks by Ugandan LRA rebels in the northeast of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a local association said.

The attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army rebels took place between March 11 and 14 in Bangadi, Duru and Dungu in Orientale province about 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of the border with the Central African Republic.

Aruna Sambia, chairman of a civil group in Dungu, told AFP that the dead included three members of one family.

Led by Joseph Kony, wanted along with two other leaders by the International Criminal Court for war crimes, the LRA took up arms in 1988 in northern Uganda and has acquired a reputation for brutality.

Since 2005, under pressure from the Ugandan army, the fighters pulled back from their bases in Uganda to move into the remote northeast of the DRC, where they were said to number less than 100 late last year, according to the UN mission in the DRC.

Elections and Governness

Bozizé candidate in Central African elections

afrol News

François Bozizé, President of the Central African Republic, has announced his candidacy at the upcoming 25 April presidential elections. Several opposition groups have already announced they will boycott the polls.

The incumbent, speaking yesterday at the Barthélémy Boganda stadium in the capital, Bangui, announced he had accepted to stand for re-election, representing the Kwa na Kwa labour party founded by himself in August 2009.

President Bozizé in February decreed that the impoverished nation were to hold elections on 25 April. The electoral campaigns were to be organised between 12 and 23 April, the same decree said. At the same time, parliamentary elections will be held.

The incumbent seized power in Bangui through a military coup in March 2003. Two years later, he was elected President, gaining 43 percent in the first round of the popular vote in a poll that has been described as relatively free and fair. In the second poll round, he won over former PM Martin Ziguélé with 64 percent of the vote.

Several minor opposition parties in the Central African Republic already in February announced they would boycott this year's presidential elections. Some groups alleged elections would in anyway be rigged, referring to experiences with President Bozizé's rule. Other complain they were given too little time to prepare for the polls.

The run-up to the Central African elections has been disturbed by a government claim of a coup plot this weekend. Opposition forces claim President Bozizé has fabricated the coup threat.

The alleged coup plot could have great implications for the upcoming elections as government sources imply President Bozizé's main opponent is involved. Ex-President Ange-Félix Patassé, who was toppled by Mr Bozizé in 2003, was said to be implicated in the plot.

Mr Patassé was forced to flee the country for several years after the coup. Last year, he was allowed to return to Bangui, and he has strongly indicated his interest in standing candidate in the upcoming presidential elections. The ex-President would be President Bozizé main challenger, observers held.

But his alleged implication in a coup plot could give President Bozizé pretence to detain Mr Patassé or otherwise bar him from the elections. Ex-President Patassé has already strongly denied any involvement in the alleged coup plot.

President Bozizé will in any case be favourite to win the upcoming elections. His power basis remains broad and the Central African leader is known to be keen to keep hold on to power.

Election dates finally set for São Tomé

afrol News,

President Fradique de Menezes of São Tomé and Príncipe has decreed that local and legislative elections will be held in July and August, after government had been unable to follow the original election schedule.

Elections to the São Toméan parliament were originally slated for February this year. They were later rescheduled for April, and finally indefinitely postponed. Municipal elections should even be held in September last year, but were also subjected to repeated postponements.

The archipelago's President yesterday finally made a decision when the delayed polls were to take place, São Toméan media report today. In a decree issued in the presidential palace, President Menezes says "the implementation of regional and municipal elections is scheduled for 25 July 2010."

The next paragraph in the decree says that "the holding of legislative elections is scheduled for 1 August 2010." The announcement was read out in national radio and television news last night.

The presidential decree further makes it clear that the Head of State is the sole responsible for picking election dates. It addresses what he considers legal "misconceptions" of a believed need for the President to consult with political parties to define a feasible election day. This was not the case, President Menezes points out, in yet another round of conflicts between the São Toméan presidency and parliament.

Political leaders in São Tomé were preparing for discussions with the President to discuss an election date. According to the local newspaper 'O Parvo', the decree therefore came as "a surprise" to politicians.

The late election dates are conflicting with the election legislation of São Tomé and Príncipe, which foresees a maximum delay of four months after the four-year terms finalises.

But the National Electoral Commission had made it clear it would not be able to organise free and fair elections. The Commission was lacking funds, and the upcoming local and legislative polls were seen as extra expensive as there was a need for a modernised and updated electoral roll.

São Tomé and Príncipe since 1990 have been a functional multi-party democracy were

elections are widely seen to be both free and fair. Nevertheless, under President Menezes, the archipelago has experienced political instability with steadily changing governments due to a deeply-rooted conflict between the presidency and parliament.

Gabon opposition warns of coup

Afrol News

The runner-up to Gabon's 2009 presidential polls this week warned that the "general discontent" with President Ali Bongo within the year could lead to "Niger-like coup." Government officials see the statement as a serious threat.

André Mba Obame, a leading figure in Gabon's opposition National Union party, in an interview with the French daily 'Express' said the danger of an armed coup in his country was imminent. Mr Mba Obame was an independent candidate at the August 2009 presidential elections in Gabon, where he polled second with 26 percent of the votes, is one of the key figures in the newly founded opposition party.

The opposition leader in the interview said that, in Gabon, "discontent is general. If it continues like this, one will see a coup before the end of the year. A coup like the one in Niger." Mr Mba Obame added that also the army was in uproar and flexing its muscles, referring to recent actions by 300 soldiers demanding outstanding payments and succeeding to blackmail government.

The National Union was founded on 10 March in Libreville this year as a merger of several older Gabonese opposition parties, aiming at ending the opposition's traditional division. It was established to implement "a strategy for a democratic power alternation" in Gabon, which has been politically dominated by the Bongo family since independence.

Mr Mba Obame's statements created immediate confusion among his new political partners. Party President Zacharie Myboto, who polled fourth in the presidential elections, was surprised by the statement. He told journalists the party would make an official statement later, after having discussed the issue internally.

The Libreville government reacted strongly to the statements by Mr Mba Obame, calling them "serious and tendentious," indicating the opposition leader was jeopardizing stability in Gabon. Opposition spokesman Bruno Ben Moubamba answered by accusing authorities of "exaggerating the affair to prohibit the National Union and to force Mba Obame into exile."

Yesterday, however, party leader Myboto met with Gabonese Interior Minister Jean François Ndongou. Speaking to the press after the meeting, Mr Myboto tried to downplay his colleague's statement by saying there were "no particular dangers" in Gabon.

He further emphasised that his party respects "the rule of law and pluralistic democracy."

Mr Mba Obame had in no way spoken in favor of a coup in Gabon, he further emphasised, and there had been no call for civil disobedience. He urged people to remain calm.

Finally, Mr Myboto said he had also urged Minister Ndongou to finally legalising the new National Union party. Doing so would be a "move in the right direction," he said.

Gabon's Ali Bongo now also party chief

Afrol News

President Ali Bongo of Gabon, who "inherited" the presidency from his father in 2009, now also followed late Omar Bongo's footsteps as freshly elected leader of the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG). The PDG has been in power since its establishment.

The ruling PDG this weekend has celebrated its tenth party congress in Libreville. The first post on the programme was to elect the party's new leader.

According to a statement issued by the party, "the former Vice-President of the PDG, the Head of State and President of the Republic, has been unanimously elected President of the PDG, according to the internal rules of this political entity." The person in question is Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba.

Since the death of the current President's father, President Omar Bongo, in June 2009, the party has had an interim leader. Since the ascension of Mr Bongo jr to the Gabonese presidency, it has been clear he would be elected the party's leader.

But immediately after his father's death, this was still not clear. Ali Bongo, thus Defence Minister, was unpopular within party ranks, according to many reports from Gabon at the time. His playboy past had somewhat discredited him and many party members felt it was time for new leaders from outside the Bongo family.

Therefore, no less than ten applicants to become the PDG's official candidate in the August 2009 presidential elections stood forward. The Bongo family however succeeded in gathering enough support for Bongo jr in what has been described as a non-transparent process within the PDG.

Mr Bongo, according to official results, won the presidential election with 42 percent of the vote.

The PDG has held power, first as the sole legal party, since it was established by Omar Bongo in 1968. In 1990, multi-party elections were introduced in Gabon, but all have been won by the PDG. The opposition at each juncture has claimed widespread fraud, which is sustained by some observers.

With his unsurprising election to lead the PDG, Mr Bongo has assured yet another step to

consolidate his power in Gabon. Indeed, the party leader was so sure of his victory that he left on a scheduled trip to Morocco shortly after his election, leaving the party congress to go on without its new president.