

Report # 112
BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
Central Africa
Hafiz Akif Naeem
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1. Africa-U.S Relations

Rwanda: Govt Partners With U.S. Trust to Protect Gishwati

The New Times

Kigali — The government and Great Ape Trust of Iowa, US, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the sustainable management of the Gishwati natural forest reserve, the Minister for Lands and Environment, Stanislas Kamanzi, said yesterday

He told The New Times in an interview that the choice to work with the Great Ape Trust was a result of the Trust's support of the government's efforts to rehabilitate and conserve the forest.

"The Trust was forthcoming in supporting the government's efforts in the rehabilitation and the conservation of the 600-hectare natural forest patch that had remained after the deforestation in the aftermath of the Genocide and subsequent insurgency that plagued that area," he said

To date, the government has expanded the natural forest to 1,400 hectares to create a National Conservation Park. Gishwati forest is also home to 15 endangered chimpanzees.

Kamanzi said that Great Ape Trust's experience in conservation was welcomed in the endeavour to nurture the rich biodiversity harboured in that forest and establish a corridor linking Gishwati and Nyungwe to create a wider reproduction environment for the small chimpanzee family.

According to the MoU, both parties will work towards linking the isolated Gishwati chimpanzees to the much larger population in Nyungwe National Park.

"The TRUST/GACP is responsible for designing a plan for forest expansion and management of the chimpanzee population, including the establishment of a forest corridor to Nyungwe National Park, and agrees to present the first draft of that plan by March 2011," the MoU reads in part.

Great Ape Trust has pledged at least US\$1 million to the project.

2. Economy and Energy

Rwanda: Country, France Sign - 3 Million Energy Deal

The New Times

Kigali — Rwanda has signed a -3 million loan agreement with the government of France to increase electrification in rural areas. The deal was signed between Finance Minister John Rwangombwa and French Ambassador, Laurent Contini. Rwangombwa hailed the

deal, saying that it signifies the commencement of development activities between the two countries.

According to the minister, the loan will be paid in three years and the payment will be returned to Rwanda in form of a grant.

"The loan is simple. The issue is not the value of money, rather the beginning of many more development programmes," Rwangombwa said.

The deal is signed at a time the government is devising ways of increasing rural electrification as a way of improving the livelihoods of the population.

Contini said that his government is targeting many development projects, including the methane gas exploitation.

"It is an innovative mechanism we are implementing in Rwanda and more will come as both countries cement relations," Contini said.

Rwanda: Kagame to Chair ITU Commission

The New Times

Kigali — President Paul Kagame is set to chair the new global broadband commission, an initiative that will be put in place by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to implement broadband initiatives. This was revealed yesterday by the Secretary General of ITU, Dr. Hamadoun Ibrahim Touré, after he paid a courtesy call on President Kagame at Urugwiro Village. Touré explained that his visit was mainly aimed at discussing the broadband development progress across the continent following the 'Connect Africa Summit' that was held in Kigali in 2007.

"I came purposely to brief the President on the Connect Africa results, after which we also discussed the global broadband initiatives that are in place, as well as the one ITU is launching together with UNESCO," Touré said.

"We are putting together a global broadband commission which we have kindly asked President Kagame to chair and he has accepted".

The ITU boss went ahead to explain that this commission, also supported by UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, will be directly linked to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

"As you know, the target for MDGs is 2015. Many people have said that the goals will not be met, but what we are saying is that the situation is not whether we meet the goals or not, but rather what we do to achieve them". In this regard, he emphasized that all initiatives are geared towards increasing connectivity, so that services like e-health, e-commerce are facilitated in a bid to achieve sustainable development. He also

commended Rwanda's ICT progress, highlighting that the country is on track in terms of infrastructure, optical fibre development as well as inter-connectivity to the outside world.

"This is happening because you have visionary leadership with a President who dares to dream and dream big for his country. He is also a practical man who wants things to be done immediately," Touré said.

"That is why we feel obliged to come and report to him every progress of the practical outcomes of the Connect Africa summit which was organized on his soil".

According to David Kanamugire, the Permanent Secretary in Ministry of ICT in the Office of the President, the commission will be functional in June this year and it is a global recognition of Kagame's leadership and dedication to technological advancement.

"The President was happy about the progress shown by states after the summit, especially in regard to efforts in infrastructural development. Rwanda has shown exemplary efforts and other countries are looking up to us as a model nation." Kanamugire said.

"Participants at the conference had also pledged to raise \$55 million and a big percentage of this fund has been raised to facilitate progress of ICT development."

Kigali Institute of Science and Technology also awarded Dr. Touré with an honorary doctorate for his exemplary role in fostering ICT.

Congo Could Have Most of Debt Forgiven by June

VOA

\$11-billion debt relief comes in wake of President Kabila moving to reform economy, better control spending

The Democratic Republic of Congo could have the bulk of its external debt forgiven by June in a deal with foreign donors and the International Monetary Fund. Repaying nearly \$11-billion of debt is a heavy burden for an economy still recovering from fighting between 1998 and 2003 that killed more than 3 million people. Economic growth last year was less than three percent, depressed by a larger-than-expected slowdown in mining and construction. Inflation last month was estimated to be nearly 50 percent in a country with an average per capita income of just more than \$170 a year. But President Joseph Kabila's moves to reform the economy and better control spending have the Democratic Republic of Congo on the verge of an historic deal that could see that nearly \$11-billion debt slashed to just more than \$2 billion. International Monetary Fund mission chief Brian Ames says "steadfast actions" are still needed, but the country appears on target to secure debt forgiveness by its 50th independence anniversary on June 30th. Ames says if the Kabila government continues to take necessary steps, the IMF and

World Bank can prepare all the necessary documents for that plan to be in place by the end of June.

Seven years after a peace deal ended most of the fighting, Central Bank Governor Jean-Claude Masangu Mulongo says continuing violence in the eastern Kivu regions means Congo is still not fully benefiting from its mineral wealth.

Masangu Mulongo says Congo needs to find a way to manage its security problems, while at the same time keeping its macroeconomic framework on track.

The International Monetary Fund says President Kabila is improving revenue collection, better managing state spending, and making it easier for businesses to operate. Ames says central-bank reforms should help reduce inflation and increase foreign currency reserves.

If approved, Masangu Mulongo says the debt forgiveness plan would cut Congo's annual debt servicing from \$920-million to just more than \$200-million.

Masangu Mulongo says that is important because it would allow Congolese to spend the next 50 years without the burden of more than \$10-billion of debt.

The United Nations plans to begin withdrawing some of its peacekeepers from western Congo by June, which could put more of a strain on the national army to provide more of its own security. But the bulk of the 20,000-member U.N. force will remain in the east at least until next year.

President Kabila is also finalizing a \$9-billion mineral deal with China that is Beijing's largest investment in Africa, giving state-owned firms the right to develop copper and cobalt mines in exchange for building roads, railways, universities, airports, and hospitals.

The IMF decision on debt relief was delayed because of concerns about the conditions of loans in that Chinese mineral deal. The plan was modified to address those concerns, and Congo is again moving forward toward \$70-million of a three-year, \$550-million package of IMF loans due to be repaid at concessionary rates after 2016.

3. Environment

Rwanda: UN Pledges More Support to Country

The New Times

Kigali — The head of the visiting UN delegation as pledged the body's continuous support to Rwanda's health, education, agriculture and livestock initiatives. Ambassador Abderrahim Ould Hadrami, made the pledge Thursday during a field visit to Rulindo District.

"The UN is committed to working closely with the Rwandan government to increase agriculture and livestock farming production to guarantee food security for all, in addition to supporting health care and education countrywide," he said.

Hadrami hailed the district and UN agencies engaged in development projects in the area for their effort in eradicating soil erosion through the construction of terraces in Rukozo and Cyungo Sectors.

"I highly commend the district authorities and UN agencies who tirelessly worked in partnership to eradicate soil erosion in this area to will increase agriculture production," Hadrami said.

The district Mayor, Justus Kangwaje, attributed the major development projects in the district to support by UN agencies. "UNDP, WFP and FAO greatly contributed by providing fertilisers and high yield potato and wheat seeds which have increased food production in Rukozo and Cyungo sectors," Kangwaje said.

He added that residents of the sectors are now able to produce a minimum of 30 tonnes of potatoes per hectare, unlike in the past when they could only raise 10 tonnes. "This has enabled residents raise their income, thereby enabling them pay school fees for their children and join health insurance schemes in large numbers."

Kangwaje also hailed UNICEF for their contribution towards promoting education in the district. In a separate interview with The New Times, WFP Country Director, Abdoulaye Balde, pledged to increase support towards agriculture activities in the district.

"We are committed to working hand-in-hand with the government to eradicate malnutrition in children, by increasing agricultural production," Balde said. The delegation toured a community kraal commonly referred to as 'Igikumba' in Cyungo, where residents' cattle produce manure to fertilize their gardens.

They also paid a visit to Stella Matutina High School's Biogas production projects in Shyorongi Sector. The project is jointly funded by the UNDP in partnership with the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) and Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (KIST). The National UNDP small Grant Program coordinator, Laure Kananura, said Biogas production at the school is part of efforts to protect the environment. "Bio gas is used for cooking students' food, thereby reducing the rate of felling trees for firewood," said Kananura.

In Brief: Deforestation gets a mixed report

The New Times

JOHANNESBURG, 26 March 2010 (IRIN) - One of the most comprehensive forest reviews conducted by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization shows that the rate of forest loss had dropped by three million hectares every year between 2000 and 2010. Around 13 million hectares of forests were converted to other uses or lost through natural causes each year between 2000 and 2010; during the 1990s around 16 million hectares were lost annually. The world's forests cover just over four billion hectares or 31 percent of the total land area.

Other significant findings released on 25 March were: Brazil and Indonesia, which recorded highest loss of forests in the 1990s, have significantly reduced their deforestation rates. - South America lost 4 million hectares of forest per year; Africa lost 3.4 million hectares annually - these were the highest losses in the last decade.

Oceania registered a net loss of forests, partly due to severe drought in Australia since 2000. Asia registered a net gain of some 2.2 million hectares annually in the last decade. Tree-planting programmes in China, India, the United States and Vietnam, combined with a natural expansion of forests in some regions, added more than seven million hectares of new forests annually. The full report of the assessment will be released in October 2010.

4. Politics

Rwanda: FDU's Ingabire Attempts to Flee

The New Times

Kigali — The leader of the yet-to-be registered political party, Forces Démocratiques Unifiées- FDU-Inkingi, Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza, was yesterday intercepted at Kigali International Airport, as she attempted to sneak out of the country.

Ingabire, who was scheduled to report to the Criminal Investigations Department today, as investigations into her FDLR activities continue, was advised to return home.

In an interview with The New Times, Government Spokesperson, Louise Mushikiwabo, who is also the Minister of Foreign Affairs, confirmed the attempted escape, adding that Ingabire has deliberately continued to disregard the laws of the country.

"What happened is that Ingabire was intercepted at the entrance of the airport trying to leave the country, yet there are investigations still going on.

"Whatever country she was headed to, I assume it is the Netherlands, she should know that they have the same laws as those here. When one has to answer to any authorities for

investigation purposes, they are not allowed to leave the country until investigations are over," Mushikiwabo said.

In November last year, Ingabire featured prominently in a UN report, as one of the key supporters and fundraisers for the FDLR terrorist organization..

The East African

"This confirms what has been said all along. This woman does not think that she should abide by the laws that govern this country," Mushikiwabo said.

Police Spokesperson Supt. Eric Kayiranga confirmed that Ingabire is scheduled to report to CID today.

"We are expecting her to abide by the rules and report today," Kayiranga said.

According to diplomatic sources, subsequent to her return home, Victoire Ingabire automatically lost her refugee status in the Netherlands. However, she was strangely issued a three-year visa by the Dutch embassy in Kigali, which she apparently was attempting to use to sneak out of the country.

Rwanda: Accountability Vital, Kagame Tells Leaders

The New Times

Kigali — President Paul Kagame has said that he is ready to do whatever it takes to protect the nation from ill-intentioned people.

The President made the remarks yesterday while officiating at the swearing-in ceremony of two new Members of Parliament; Hamidou Omar and Athanasie Gahondogo, as well as the Deputy Ombudsman, Bernadette Kanzayire.

Kagame assured the country of full protection and security, and that he will not tolerate anything that causes insecurity, adding that the recent incidents were minor.

He thanked both Chambers of Parliament for their tremendous achievements saying that much had been achieved, especially in passing urgent bills.

The President promised the newly sworn-in officials full government support as they execute their new assignments.

He reminded them of the importance of the oath they had just taken and emphasized the importance of accountability on the part of leaders, right from the President, to the lowest levels of administration.

Kagame reminded the leaders that their main obligation was to work together for the sake of the nation. He stressed that most of the problems Rwanda had faced in the past, were a result of leadership that did not account to the people.

The President dismissed arguments that the Genocide in Rwanda occurred because too much power was delegated to leaders, adding that those harbouring such views were deceiving themselves

He pointed out that power is not the problem, but how and where the leaders exercise those powers.

Commenting on the forthcoming presidential election, President Kagame said that Rwandans have the right to make their choice of leaders who will steer the country in the right direction.

He said that what the country went through and where it is now, shows that Rwandans have matured in their understanding of the politics.

Rwanda: Cry for Our Blocked Minds!

The New Times

Kigali — Last Wednesday's (24.03.10) edition of The New Times bore interesting headlines on its first page. The first was "FDU's Ingabire attempts to flee" and, below it, "Top FDLR commander surrenders".

Colonel Rashid Ngoboka, erstwhile head of training in Rally for Unity and Democracy (RUD - Urunana), a faction of Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), had earlier handed himself over to the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) and was last Tuesday received by officials in Rwanda.

Did this have any bearing on the strange behavior last Tuesday of the fire-spitting president of the hitherto-unregistered Forces Démocratiques Unifiées (FDU - Inkingi), Ingabire Victoire Umuhoza? Remember, there is a healthy scattering of those Forces Démocratiques that are unified under her motherly tutelage.

So, what is it with our saviour that she should cut and run? And to think that Ingabire is leaving us - poor souls that she came to deliver from fear - high and dry. Well, maybe time will tell - if it is not already telling faster than is good for anybody's comfort.

This, however, is not to engage in any exercise of discovering what ails what a friend calls "that girlfriend of yours". I have already used too much of The New Times' ink on that effort. Right now, there are so many troubling puzzles that there is no time to "indulge sentiments".

For instance, why did so many Americans give their president hard time over his quest for universal healthcare? You'd think that every patriot would hail a government that seeks to take care of the health of everyone on its soil. Yet, it seems that the "fear" digs deeper than we ordinary souls can ever comprehend.

It is not the fear alluded to by the likes of Ingabire in their attempt to hoodwink those in the West who are too gullible to see through their ruse, but the "fear of the minority". The main reason for the resistance to healthcare for all, it seems, is this "fear of the minority".

The rich in America who resisted that healthcare did not do so because they didn't want poor Americans to be taken care of. In pretending to fight a tendency to socialism, those Americans in reality did not want minority immigrants to benefit from such facilities, because they take the country to belong to no one else. And that impulsive tendency is not necessarily exclusively American. It informs the behaviour of all societies, much as only we in the third world feel its influence from the developed world. That is why a government in the third world is not judged by how well it manages its citizenry and resources, but by the individual who heads it.

Take the 52-year-old British-born Chritiane Amanpour of CNN. She is an accomplished and world-renowned journalist and a brilliant interviewer by all standards. Yet, in spite of being of Iranian-British parentage, I thought I detected that impulsive tendency in her during her interview with President Kagame.

She acquiesces to the many good achievements that the government of Rwanda has attained under the leadership of President Kagame, but makes sure they are mentioned only in passing. It is obvious to her that these many things cannot be achieved by one man in 11 million Rwandans, but no, "opponents say" it's that one man.

What forms the gist of her interview, after that, is what those "many people say". Pressed to name those "many people", she is at a loss but still goes ahead to sing the refrain of "many people say". In fact, she repeats it ten times in the interview, betraying the fact that she is not prepared for the President's patient elucidation effort.

That's why, to me, her behaviour smacks of a manifestation of that impulsive tendency. It has always been claimed that the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) constituted a large chunk of Rwandans who lived in Uganda for a long time, ever since late Habyarimana branded them invaders from Uganda.

Add to that the fact that Western anthropological 'findings' fixed the origin of Batutsi firmly in Ethiopia, even if some of their families can trace their ancestries back more centuries than anybody can. Then there is the fact of having a president from this so-called minority ethnic group.

Put all that together and voilà: "Sixteen years after the slaughter of 800 Tutsis, Rwandan opposition leader, Victoire Ingabire, has dared to discuss the grievances of Hutus who,

though a majority, are excluded from good jobs and political power". I can see your incredulous blinking, if you have not seen that statement in that paper.

That, believe it or not, is picked straight out of the page of the respected 'The Globe and Mail' newspaper, when illustrating an interview with her! The paper has not bothered to establish that the number of genocide victims is slightly over 1.2 million. Nor has it bothered to check out who is in power, even if everything is online.

Of course, what is shocking is not that a newspaper can present such ridiculously gross inaccuracies about Rwanda to its esteemed readers as news. What is shocking is that the author was in Rwanda, in Kigali, to be exact. Talk about wholesale importation - even importing the "fear of the minority"! Calamitous does not begin to describe our situation.

Rwanda: Scholar Commends Govt-China Relations

The New Times

Kigali — A director at the Institute of West Asian & African Studies at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Dr. He Wenping, has hailed the prevailing good relations between Rwanda and China.

Wenping, who is in charge of African Studies, made the observation while presenting a paper on China-Africa Relations in the Era of Globalization during a public lecture at Kigali Institute of Education (KIE).

Addressing the lecture, organised by Confucius Chinese language Institute, Dr. Wenpig said that the future of Rwanda-China relations is bright.

She revealed that the youth are the driving force for taking forward this relationship.

"However, there is a need to establish an economic and promotion centre in both countries in order to expand and strengthen economic cooperation as well as people-to-people and cultural exchanges," Wenping added.

"Learning Chinese is the key for grasping the historic opportunity and building the bridge between China and Rwanda, language barrier is one of the biggest challenges, Chinese youth should learn English, French and Kinyarwanda as well"

She added that China plans to launch a China-Africa joint research and exchange program to increase exchanges and cooperation, share development experience, and provide intellectual support for formulating better cooperation policies by the two countries.

5. Peace keeping/ Conflict Resolution and Security matters

Rwanda: Nation, Ethiopia Strengthen Defence Ties

The New Times

Kigali — Rwanda and Ethiopia yesterday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which will see the two countries strengthen their defence and military cooperation. The MoU was signed by the Minister of Defence, Gen. Marcel Gatsinzi and his Ethiopian counterpart, Siraj Fegesa as well as the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Gen. James Kabarebe, and his Ethiopian counterpart, Gen. Samora Yunus. The agreement will see the two countries strengthen defence and military cooperation in the area of training and education as well as sharing information on military operations and equipment. Gatsinzi said that Rwanda and Ethiopia have shared a long history of cooperation in the areas of defence and that the new bilateral deal will cement the already existing 'strong relationship' the two nations have been sharing. His Ethiopian counterpart said that his country is committed to maintain the long-lasting 'sisterly' relations the two countries have shared and that they will continue to work hand-in-hand to maintain high standards of stability and citizen protection. "When the 1994 Genocide started, Ethiopia was the first country to respond and called upon the international community to react. We were also among the first to send soldiers here to intervene," Fegesa said.

Conflict

"This shows you that we have had a long history of brotherhood and we believe this MoU will further enhance the mutual understanding between ourselves as well as the mutual benefits that will come out of the bilateral cooperation". In an interview with The New Times, Brig. Gen Jean Bosco Kazura, the head of Training and Operations in RDF, said that Ethiopia and Rwanda have a cordial military relationship. He revealed that cooperation has mainly been in the area of education and training as well several peacekeeping initiatives in which Rwanda is involved. Last month, Ethiopia contributed five attack helicopters to the United Nations Mission in Darfur. The helicopters were much needed considering the fact that the mission is facing logistical challenges.

UN: Illegal Arms Trade Fuels Central African Conflicts

VOA

The United Nations says conflict in Central Africa is fueled by an illegal-weapons trade that increases cross-border crime and threatens national reconciliation.

Organized crime involved in drug trafficking and the illegal exploitation of mineral resources provides a steady flow of weapons that is making conflict in Central Africa more violent and more difficult to contain.

U.N. Deputy Secretary General Asha-Rose Migiro says the illegal trafficking of small arms and light weapons never happens in isolation.

"Weapons trafficking in Central Africa has complex links, not only to conflict, but also to a number of other criminal activities, which undermine our efforts to engender social justice, foster the rule of law and, ultimately, achieve the Millennium Development Goals," Migiro said. "The link between the illicit exploitation and trade of natural resources, and the illicit proliferation and trafficking of arms, has become increasingly apparent."

Migiro says local demand from militia and rebel groups in Central Africa remains strong. While some governments are working to promote disarmament and stop the illegal weapons trade, Migiro says they are often overwhelmed by the scale of the threat and the relative ease with which these weapons cross borders.

"Limited national and regional capacity, porous borders and the spillover effects of conflicts in the region have impeded effective small-arms control," Migiro added. "As a result, Central Africa is awash with illicit weapons, exacerbating inter-communal violence, increasing cross-border crime and threatening ongoing peace and national reconciliation processes."

She says efforts by the Economic Community of Central African States to eradicate the illegal arms trade cannot succeed without a stronger commitment by nations that supply those weapons. Migiro wants a global treaty regulating the arms trade.

The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament Affairs offers training and legal assistance for civil society groups, governments, and regional organizations. Migiro says it will now help draft the sub-region's first legally-binding instrument on the control of small arms and light weapons, ammunition, explosives and equipment supporting their manufacture.

"Other urgent priorities include stockpile management, the security of weapons and ammunition, and measures to control the import, export, transit and re-transfer of weapons," Migiro noted. "More must also be done to build national capacities to mark weapons, keep adequate records and trace illicit ones in line with international and regional standards."

Migiro says it is time all U.N. member states help Central African governments improve weak regulation and enforcement measures to improve sub-regional stability and create conditions for sustainable development.

Rwanda: Arrest Warrants Issued for Kayumba and Karegyeya

The NewTimes

Kigali — A highly placed source in the Prosecutor General's office has revealed to The New Times that the government has issued international arrest warrants against Lt. Gen. Kayumba Nyamwasa and Patrick Karegyeya, who are believed to be behind recent terrorist activities in and around Kigali. The two fled to South Africa. The source, added that, extradition requests had already been sent to South African authorities. "The charges include terrorism and creating a terror criminal organisation," the source said. "Interpol

has already been alerted." "We have assured the South Africans that the two fugitives would receive a fair hearing and will be treated in line with international humanitarian law," the source added.

On February 19, three grenades were hurled at various bus stands around the city, killing two people and wounding 28. Prosecution has confirmed that they have testimonies from several witnesses, who link the attacks to Kayumba and Karegyeya. Kayumba, the former High Commissioner to India, fled the country immediately after the attacks. He passed through Uganda and proceeded to join Karegyeya in South Africa.

Once extradited, the two suspects will be tried in the High Court at First Instance and appeals would be heard by the Supreme Court.

6. Military/ Rebels/ Terrorism/ War on Terror

DRC-UGANDA: Still afraid of the LRA

IRIN

Hundreds of thousands of people displaced by Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo are still afraid to return to their villages, despite a lull in attacks, a UN spokesman said.

Some 298,000 people were displaced in Haut Uele district in 2009, along with 42,500 in Aru territory in Ituri. Another 20,000 fled to Southern Sudan and 3,500 to Central African Republic, said Ndiaga Seck, associate information officer with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in the North Kivu provincial capital of Goma.

"Displacement rose 9 percent in Haut Uele and 11 percent in Bas Uele after a massacre in Makombo in December," he said. "The attacks have since subsided, except in some places, but most IDPs [internally displaced persons] are still living with host families."

The 14-17 December massacre left 321 civilians dead and 250 abducted, including at least 80 children, according to Human Rights Watch.

"The Makombo massacre is one of the worst ever committed by the LRA in its bloody 23-year history," Anneke van Woudenberg, HRW senior Africa researcher, said in a report issued on 28 March. "The four-day rampage demonstrates that the LRA remains a serious threat to civilians and is not a spent force, as the Ugandan and Congolese governments claim."

The rebels attacked at least 10 villages, killing mostly men. Many were first tied up and then hacked to death with machetes; others had their skulls crushed with axes and heavy wooden sticks.

"The people of northeastern Congo and other LRA-affected areas have suffered for far too long," said Van Woudenberg. "The US and other concerned governments should work with the UN and regional parties to develop and carry out a comprehensive strategy to protect civilians and apprehend abusive LRA leaders."

Before the attack, the LRA had circulated threats of an impending attack in Niangara region of Haut Uele, forcing some residents to flee. A security source in eastern DRC told IRIN that LRA numbers had been reduced to "several hundred", but they were still very brutal. He confirmed the Makombo massacre, describing the killings as "gruesome".

But an LRA spokesman in Nairobi told the BBC it was difficult to prove the LRA was behind the massacre. Similar doubts were expressed by Ugandan army spokesman Felix Kulaigye.

"Logically the population in Congo are so dispersed; therefore it makes it difficult for a force that is so thin on the ground to kill that number of people," he said. "Even within five days, the LRA, who are now about 200, does not have the capacity to kill all those people."

The Ugandan rebel group has a history of violent attacks against civilians. According to Enough Project, the LRA has killed at least 1,800 civilians in the DRC since 2008, with more than 100 murdered in January.

"Abductions peaked in March 2009 with over 500 cases, including 300 in Bas Uele," Seck told IRIN on 29 March. "And when they moved, the rebels committed a lot of massacres."

Central African Republic: LRA Kill 10 in Fresh Attacks in CAR

The Monitor

Kampala — The Lord's Resistance Army now based in the Central African Republic are reported to have killed at least 10 people, injured more than 30 and abducted another estimated 50 people in a weekend attack on Boka village in the CAR.

According to humanitarian agencies working in the area, the rebels have intensified their attacks against civilian targets in the area where they are operating.

Defence and Army Spokesman Felix Kulayigye confirmed to Daily Monitor that rebels had attacked an area near Obo but disputed the numbers of those killed and abducted.

Lt. Col. Kulayigye said the rebels killed nine and abducted 13. He said the area attacked did not have a UPDF presence but added the army had responded immediately to pursue the rebels on a mission to rescue those abducted.

The LRA were pushed out of northern Uganda in 2005 first into Sudan but have since dug deeper into the Democratic Republic of Congo and CAR, after nearly two years of peace negotiations ended in failure.

7. Human Rights/ Social Issues

DR Congo massacre uncovered

AL Jazeera

The DRC army has been attempting to quell unrest in the north and east of the country [EPA]

The Lord's Resistance Army killed about 300 people and kidnapped 250 more in a rampage in the Democratic Republic of Congo in December 2009, according to an international rights group and the UN.

The previously undocumented massacre, undertaken over four-days in the remote Makombo area of DRC's northeastern Haute Uele district, was highlighted in reports by Human Rights Watch and the UN on Sunday.

The killings of 321 civilians occurred between December 14 and 17, HRW said in a report after documenting the deaths in a visit to the region in February.

The Ugandan anti-government group were said to have abducted 80 children among the 250 people kidnapped.

"The Makombo massacre is one of the worst ever committed by the LRA in its bloody 23-year history, yet it has gone unreported for months," Anneke Van Woudenberg, HRW's senior Africa researcher, said.

"The four-day rampage demonstrates that the LRA remains a serious threat to civilians and is not a spent force, as the Ugandan and Congolese governments claim."

However, Obonyo Olweny, a former LRA spokesman, has told Al Jazeera that while the group is still active, it is not fighting civilians.

"I want to say categorically to the world that the LRA is not responsible for the killings going on in the [Democratic Republic of] Congo or the CAR [Central Africa Republic]," he said from Nairobi, Kenya, on Sunday.

"It is the UPD [the Ugandan armed forces] carrying out the killings - it is part of the government's propaganda."

'Really brutal'

The UN said that its investigation had shown that the LRA had killed at least 290 people, perhaps more than 300, during the rampage and following LRA threats of such massacres the year before.

"The men were tied by the chest by the same rope and killed with wood sticks on the back of the head and neck - it was really brutal and fast," Liliane Egounlety, who led the UN investigation, said.

"They also used machetes. Many witnesses found it too hard to talk about."

The UN said that at least 150 people had been abducted.

HRW's investigation found that the LRA had made some of the 80 abducted children murder other children.

The LRA has a reputation of forcing children into becoming soldiers.

HRW said that the attacks in at least 10 villages were well planned, targeting men first, but also killing women and children.

The group said that the youngest person to die was a three-year-old girl who was burned to death, while at least 13 gangs and 23 children were killed.

Their document said that some people were killed by having their heads smashed with axes and heavy wooden sticks.

Regional problem

The LRA was formed in northern Uganda in the late-1980s as an opposition group.

In 2005, they were forced out of the East African country to the DRC, Central African Republic and south Sudan, from where they continued to launch cross-border attacks.

LRA fighters killed 1,200 people and kidnapped 1,400 others - including 630 children and more than 400 women - in the DRC during a 10-month period in 2008 and 2009, the UN has said.

Van Woudenberg told Al Jazeera that the LRA had become a regional problem that needed action by the United Nations and African governments.

"What it does show is that it is high time for the Lord's Resistance Army leaders to be arrested, for them to be brought to justice and these kind of atrocities to end," she said.

"I think what is needed is some bold leadership, some really courageous steps taken by the governments of the region, by the United Nations peacekeeping forces to put together an regional strategy to end the terror of this group."

A much-criticised UN mission remains in the east of DRC but is under pressure to leave the country by next year, when presidential polls are due to be held.

Monuc, the peacekeeping force, has about 22,000 soldiers in the region to keep peace in the face of Rwandan Hutu fighters.

"The difficulty and the challenge for United Nations peacekeepers that are stationed in that region, the Ugandan army and the Congolese army is that these men move through the bush at night; in many instances they dressed in military fatigues," Al Jazeera's Yvonne Ndege said from Nigeria.

"Many of the villagers are unsuspecting to begin with ... initially these villagers were assisting the LRA fighters because they thought they were regular soldiers."

Major challenges

Alan Doss, the UN special representative to DRC and head of Monuc, says the sheer size of the territory the peacekeepers are supposed to cover is one of the major challenges facing the mission.

"We have no soldiers in that area. At that time [of the massacre], we had focused on the major population centres, which are quite a distance away," he told Al Jazeera on Sunday.

"They [the LRA fighters] are made up of small groups that move around.

"To deal with them effectively, we need to improve intelligence gathering, have additional air mobility [as there are no roads in many places], and be able to put Special Forces into these areas quickly to anticipate their moves and deal with them."

DRC: Aid delivery under threat in Kivus

IRIN

NAIROBI, 23 March 2010 (IRIN) - A recent upsurge in threats against aid agencies in the Kivu provinces of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has raised concerns that the humanitarian space in the region could shrink again, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says.

"We received letters asking the International Rescue Committee [IRC] to withdraw from Rutshuru," Ndiaga Seck, OCHA associate information officer in the provincial capital, Goma, said. "Last Friday, youths in Masisi marched along the streets demanding jobs. When these kinds of things happen, humanitarians cannot reach beneficiaries."

The letters came as the German charity, Welthungerhilfe, suspended work in Walikale territory following threats to its staff. IRC later resumed operations.

“What all this means is that the situation in North Kivu is still volatile, especially in Rutshuru, Walikale and Masisi [territories],” Seck told IRIN on 23 March.

Some days before, armed Congolese soldiers had stormed into a hospital in Fizi, Katanga village, in South Kivu, kidnapping three rival fighters. The 11 March attack prompted staff of the charity, Spanish Doctors without Borders (MSF-Espagne), to leave the facility.

"This incident is a violation of basic humanitarian principles; all sick and wounded have the right to medical care," said Philippe Havet, MSF head of mission in South Kivu. "We demand that all armed actors respect medical structures and the safety of wounded people and medical staff. Unarmed, wounded belligerents enjoy this protection as any other patient."

The incident, MSF said in a statement, had forced it to evacuate a surgical team that had been providing treatment in Hauts-Plateaux area.

"Wounded people were already afraid to come to the hospital of Katanga and seek help, in fear of being killed by armed men," Havet added. "Now, after this serious incident, I am afraid they will never be convinced that it is safe for them to seek any medical help."

Another charity, World Emergency Relief, said a clash between the Congolese army and Rwandan FDLR fighters in Rubuga village within the same territory had left 204 families without shelter. Their crops were also destroyed or stolen, the charity said on 22 March.

OCHA said the incident involving MSF would also affect the work of the International Medical Aid (AMI) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). According to the agency, three incidents out of 10 reported in the Kivu provinces in February targeted humanitarians.

Fighting militia

Meanwhile, in Ituri District, some 15,000 people were apparently being held against their will by soldiers in villages between Bukiringi (85km south of Bunia, the main town in the district) and Zunguluka (123km south of Bunia), on suspicion that there were some militiamen among these civilians.

The army is involved in an operation against armed militias in the Kivu provinces. On 11 March, Gen Amuli Bahigwa, Congolese army commander in charge of the operation, codenamed Amani Leo, in the area, said 271 Rwandan FDLR fighters had been neutralised, including 175 in South Kivu and 96 in North Kivu.

North Kivu Speaking to reporters in Goma, he said 135 dependants had been handed over to the UN Mission in the DRC, MONUC, for repatriation and 189 weapons of different calibres recovered. "Things are moving in the right direction; there is no major problem on the ground," he said. "FDLR have been defeated and are being pushed deep into the forest."

But he added: "Amani Leo is different from Kimia 2. To deserve the population's confidence, we, FARDC, must change our mindset. We must put an end to practices such as rape, forced labour, pillaging...I believe if troops change their conduct, confidence will be restored between us and the population and we will easily be accepted."

MONUC Force Commander Gel Babacar Gaye said his mission would support the Congolese army units in the operation.

UN sources in Goma estimate the fighters to number about 5,000. However, they are well-armed, trained and have integrated into the local community so they will not be easy to destroy, one security observer told IRIN.

Burundi: Experienced Official to Head Integrated UN Mission in Burundi

The New Times

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed today a veteran United Nations official with experience in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and humanitarian action as his new Executive Representative in Burundi.

Charles Petrie will succeed Youssef Mahmoud as head of the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB), spokesperson Martin Nesirky told journalists today in New York. The mission is tasked with helping the Burundian Government's efforts towards peace and stability in the impoverished country in the African Great Lakes region.

Mr. Petrie has spent the past two decades at the UN which "reflects his conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacebuilding, and humanitarian and recovery/development action," according to a statement released today by the world body.

His last post was as the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Somalia with the UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS), where he collaborated closely with the African Union (AU) and the international community to try to stabilize the region.

In addition to positions in Afghanistan, Gaza and Myanmar, he has also served as Chief of the UN Emergency Unit in Sudan, as a senior humanitarian affairs officer in Somalia and as Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator in Rwanda.

He will replace Mr. Mahmoud of Tunisia, who led BINUB for the last three years.

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

IRIN

In Betou, refugee families live side-by-side in an abandoned factory, many stretching their mosquito nets over broken machinery

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.

Health services in Congo’s Likouala province cannot even meet the needs of the local population let alone those of the refugees. 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.

Many refugees can only be accessed by river but low water levels and scarce fuel complicate even this method of delivering aid. 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.

Rwanda: It's Time for Human Rights Watch to Apologise

The New Times

Kigali — When her right-hand man, Joseph Ntawangundi, was exposed as a wanted Genocide criminal, Victoire Ingabire, and her network of Genocide revisionists cried blue murder.

They jumped to Ntawangundi's defence, demonised Gacaca courts and dragged the government in the mud. As usual, the so-called human rights activists and quack 'Rwanda experts' jumped on the bandwagon.

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, revisionists and their sympathisers, swallowed whole the cheap political hyperbole fabricated in Ingabire's backyard, portraying Ntawangundi as a victim of the alleged government repressive laws.

This newspaper was not spared their insulting missives, calling it all sorts of names, despite publishing results of a meticulous research which proved that Ntawangundi was not exactly a choirboy.

Their make-believe world came crumbling down when Ntawangundi came clean, pleading guilty and seeking forgiveness for his crimes.

It's interesting to note that once evidence against Ntawangundi became increasingly insurmountable, with his subsequent court appearance, Ingabire and her human rights supporters dropped him in quick order. Not a single one of them showed up at any of the hearings.

Her tirades, in the face of her assistant's admission of guilt, has not only brought out the true picture of the political manipulator that she is, but has also confirmed her genocide denial stance.

Indeed, if the Human Rights organisations that stood in Ntawangundi's corner, viciously attacking the Government of Rwanda, for allegedly arresting Ingabire's assistant on trumped up charges, had any conscience, they should apologise to the Rwandan people.

Congo-Kinshasa: UN Paves Way for Normalizing Life in Isolated Area of Eastern Region

The New Times

It may be a brown dirt road but the Bukavu-Shabunda route is the equivalent of a big highway in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the United Nations says its work to reconstruct the road will improve the economic, social and security situations in the troubled province of South Kivu.

"The road is a symbol of the new freedom for many people," Florian Barbey, a public information officer for the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) in Bukavu, told the UN News Centre today.

The capital of South Kivu, Bukavu lies near the border with Rwanda, some 340 kilometres east of Shabunda. Once accessible only by air or on foot, the area between the two towns has been so isolated and thus vulnerable to the operations of the rebel group FDLR as well as diseases and malnutrition.

Since 1999, MONUC has been a cushion against brutal legacies of a war that claimed some 4 million lives in the DRC between 1998 and 2003 and uprooted or displaced more than 1.25 million people. The country's easternmost areas have been beset by unrest in recent years as rebel groups and militias fight Government forces.

8. Health

Rwanda: Binagwaho Calls for Better HIV Prevention Measures

The New Times

Kigali — The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Dr Agnes Binagwaho, has appealed to all organizations involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS to focus on best measures of fighting the scourge.

She made the call yesterday while officially opening a one-day consultative meeting on HIV/AIDS prevention and management draft bill for 2010 in the East African Community.

"What you are going to propose to governments is important and the best thing for regional building. It should therefore create a friendly environment for infected persons with no discrimination and provide them with equal opportunities and equal access to resources," Binagwaho said.

The yet-to-be adopted draft bill calls for prevention, management, mitigation; care and treatment and equal rights for HIV infected people.

Currently, 70 percent of HIV infected people have access to treatment in Rwanda.

"The law should provide the best measures of fighting the scourge in all ways," Binagwaho said.

"It should be enough to focus on development, integration of EAC and Africa in general". The consultative meeting organized by Rwanda NGO Forum in collaboration with the National Commission for the Fight against Aids (CNLS), was attended by representatives from the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), parliament and civil societies, among others.

Aimable Mwananawe, the President of the forum, called for an urgent harmonized strategy in terms of legal and policy framework to prevent and manage HIV/AIDS and its consequences in the region.

The meeting serves as an opportunity to have a common understanding on the whole process of enacting the EAC HIV/AIDS prevention and management draft bill, the urgent need at country level and steps taken to complete and own the bill.