

Report # 116
BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
Central Africa
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Summary

1. Politics

Rwanda: Ingabire Appears in Court

The New Times

Victoire Umuhoza Ingabire, the leader of the yet-to-be registered political party, FDU-Inkingi, was yesterday arrested and accused before Gasabo Intermediate Court. Ingabire is charged with association with a terrorist group, propagating the Genocide Ideology, Revisionism and Ethnic Division.

Rwanda: The Icon of the Struggle for Freedom, Democracy and Justice in Arrested

The UDF Inkingi Support Committee condemns in the strongest terms possible the arrest this morning of the party Chair, Mrs. Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza, for her views on how to bring about genuine national reconciliation and peace through the rule of law and equal opportunity and how to end the cycle of political violence through a non violent, peaceful democratic competition for and exercise of power. They said that it is a tragedy for Rwanda that a call for justice for all Rwandans irrespective of political and ethnic affiliation and for an all inclusive national dialogue to give their views on how to put in place institutions that reassure every Rwandans is turned into accusations of: genocide ideology, divisionism and collaboration with a terrorist organization FDLR.

Rwanda: Top Army Generals Arrested

Two of Rwanda's most senior army officials were arrested after a major shake-up in the military was announced by President Paul Kagame. Lieutenant-General Charles Muhire and Major-General Emmanuel Karenzi Karake were suspended from duty and arrested, according to the country's military spokesperson. Lt-Gen Muhire was suspended due to serious charges of corruption and misuse of office. Lt-Gen Muhire was formerly the head of Rwanda's air force while Maj-Gen Karenzi was one of the country's highest ranking soldiers and a member of the military's ruling elite.

Rwanda: Canada Apologizes Over Genocide

Canada's Governor General, Michaëlle Jean, yesterday apologized on behalf of her government for the unresponsiveness and inaction of the international community in the lead up to, and during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. In relation to the country's recovery process, Jean noted that Rwanda has made remarkable progress as regards championing female representation in politics.

Government Has no Evidence against Me, Says Rwanda Opposition Leader

The leader of Rwanda's opposition United Democratic Forces (UDF) says President Paul Kagame's government is determined to prevent her from participating in the upcoming election scheduled for August 9. President Kagame's government has often accused the FDLR of playing a part in the country's 1994 genocide in which hundreds of thousands of Rwandans were killed in a 100-day massacre. She denied the allegations against her, saying the government has so far failed to provide evidence linking her to the charges. Ingabire said she is being targeted for having a different opinion about the genocide. She says that there is one truth in Rwanda. There was genocide against Tutsis but there were also humanity crimes against Hutus and we have to accept that and we have to find a solution to that. She said that what I'm asking is a dialogue that we can talk about it and to see what we can do to prevent future violence.

Rwanda: Ingabire Granted Bail

Ingabire granted bail but on condition that she will report to the prosecution, once a week and stay within the boundaries of Kigali City.

2. Peace keeping/ Conflict Resolution and Security matters

Congo-Kinshasa: UN Envoy Promises Increased Civilian Protection in Northwest

The top United Nations envoy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has pledged to strengthen its military presence in the northwestern province of Equateur to help the Government provide better protection for civilians following a deadly raid by rebels earlier this month on the regional capital.

3. Human Rights/ Social Issues

Rape in DRC Reaches Alarming Levels

The United Nations refugee agency says it is alarmed at the large numbers of women who continue to be victims of rape and sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The UNHCR says more than one third of recorded cases of rape, in the first three months of 2010, are in North and South Kivu provinces in eastern DRC, which hosts some 1.4 million internally displaced people. During the first three months of this year, United Nations data shows 1,244 women were sexually assaulted throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo. That averages almost 14 assaults every day. The UNHCR runs camps for 100,000 internally displaced people in Kivu province.

Funding gap threatens response to child measles outbreak in West, Central Africa – UN

Countries in West and Central Africa have been hit by a measles outbreak affecting more than 22,000 children, with a shortage of resources for vaccination threatening to roll back progress on limitation child death in the region, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has warned.

UN Agency Alarmed by Continued Sexual Violence against Women in DRC

Recent data from the UNHCR shows that women and girls in The Democratic Republic of Congo continue to be sexually assaulted throughout the country at an average of almost 14-assaults each day since the beginning of the year.

4. US-Africa

Rwanda: Africa Action Denounces Arrest of Rwandan Opposition Leader, Calls for U.S. Condemnation

Africa Action, an organization that has stood in principled solidarity with the struggle for human rights, democracy and economic justice in Africa since 1953, strongly condemns the arrest of Rwandan opposition leader Victoire Ingabire. The arrest of Ms. Ingabire follows a series of threats and harassment of opposition leaders. Africa Action calls U.S. government to condemn the human rights violation and that the Rwandan Government to take immediate steps to respect the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly of opposition parties. Africa Action notes that while Rwanda has demonstrated leadership in social development and economic recovery in the region, militarily, they have been tied to the violence and destabilization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and politically, there has been a rapid decline of constructive engagement with civil society and political opposition parties over the past few months

5. Pan Africa

Africa: Rwanda Elected to Chair AU Ministerial Council

The third ordinary session of the conference of the African Union (AU) on youth, that sat in Zimbabwe recently elected Rwanda to the chair the Conference of Ministers in Charge of Youth (COMMYIII) for the next two years. Rwanda is among the few countries in Africa, with a well-established youth council that emphasizes the need to ensure that young people are educated, in order to enable them to carry forward the development process; this was said by the youth minister.

Central African Integration Limited by Domestic Differences

New CEMAC parliament inaugurated but lack of fiscal coordination, uneven business and visa regulations hamper cooperation. Central African leaders have high hopes for a new regional parliament. Heads of state from the Central Africa Economic and Monetary Community inaugurated their new parliament with a gala opening last week. Cameroon, Gabon, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic and Chad each have five delegates to oversee the functioning and budget of a CEMAC Commission charged with promoting democracy and accelerating regional integration. Equatorial Guinea President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo says the new regional parliament in Malabo will better serve the region's people.

6. Economy and Energy

Rwanda: Gov't Targets Rwf4 Billion Tax Revenue from Cigarettes

Government has recorded large sums of tax revenue from alcohol, and tobacco products, data from the Rwanda Revenue Authority has showed. Figures presented to Business Times indicate that last year government collected Rwf952 million from wines and liquors and Rwf3 billion from cigarettes. About Rwf12 billion was also raised from imported cars. Government had sharply increased taxes on cigarettes to discourage consumption, but consumers say the increase in prices has not affected their habits.

Women Farmers Can Play Big Role in Reducing World Hunger, says New Report

Women farmers hold the “key” to sharply reducing world hunger, according to a new report from the humanitarian organization Action Aid. It’s estimated there are about one-billion people who go hungry every day. A Millennium Development Goal is to reduce that number by half by 2015. “First and foremost, particularly in places like Africa where the hunger problem is most severe, women produce most of the food. In some countries 70, 80 even 90 percent of the food people consume is produced by women small farmers,” However, he says these women lack the necessary tools and resources.

7. Elections and Governness

Gabon opposition union legalised

Gabon's opposition National Union party, uniting several major parties since March, has finally been recognized by authorities and can function officially as a political party. It will be Gabon's main opposition party. The National Union party was founded in Libreville on 10 March as a union of many of Gabon's main opposition parties. Amongst

its leaders is André Mba Obame, who was an independent candidate at the August 2009 presidential elections in Gabon, where he polled second with 26 percent of the votes.

Rwanda: Media Vital for Democracy

Michalle Jean, the Governor General of Canada, has said that journalism is an ultimate tool that strengthens democracy and helps establish a society that respects the rights of all. In her keynote address at the National University of Rwanda on the role of media in a democracy, the Governor General said that journalism is an ideal when it is practiced with concern for the truth and common good. She asserts that it is an ideal of democracy which we need to strive towards with all our strength and try to maintain it at its highest level. She reiterated the need for responsible journalism in emerging democracies like Rwanda which is working on fostering unity and reconciliation after Genocide while at the same time recognizing the responsibility of journalists in Rwanda which is trying to rebuild, to restore the ties of trust so brutally and bloodily broken.

Rwanda: A Bucket of Cold Water for Kigali's Overheated Press

Here is a sample of typical headlines in Rwandan newspapers: "Ruling party leading the country into darkness"; "The five mental illnesses of Kagame"; "Kagame and Hitler are one and the same"; "Army officers ready to slaughter thousands ..." And that is just on the days when the news is slow for the likes of Umuseso, Umuco, Umuvugizi, Umurabyo and other "U" newspapers that are published mainly in the language Kinyarwanda. But our "U" papers are not content to peddle only the alarmist or sensational. Incitement is generally part of the mix. Here is the closing paragraph of a typical feature piece in one of the papers: "Without a doubt, Rwandans need to rise up; they need to take up arms and fight this bad regime!" Rwanda, due to various historical circumstances too many to go into here, has never developed into a big media market. So the sensationalists and charlatans made inroads and captured significant readerships - especially in the Kinyarwanda language.

8. Health

HIV/AIDS Study says Death of a Mother More Detrimental to Children than Loss of the Father

It's estimated that 15 million children have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. But research shows the death of the mother to the disease can have a much greater and longer lasting effect on a child than the death of the father. The study is based on the lives of over 700 children in Kagera, Tanzania from the early 1990s to 2004. Oxford University researchers say they found the role of the mother is "more essential" to the long-term well-being of a child.

9. Refuges and Rebels

Fighting in Congo Displaces 100,000 Civilians

What began as dispute over local fishing rights is now humanitarian crisis for government in Brazzaville, security concern for government in Kinshasa. Fighting in western provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo has displaced more than 100,000 people. Some are seeking refuge across the border in Congo-Brazzaville where relief officials say they have only enough supplies to feed one-third of the refugees. The head of Congo's peacekeeping force, Alan Doss, told the Security Council that discipline in the government army is likely to remain a constant concern so long as, what he calls, structural problems in the military remain unresolved. Doss says there are persistent delays in the payment of salaries and low levels of training for many troops, especially those who have been integrated from various armed groups.

Details

1. Politics

Rwanda: Ingabire Appears in Court

The New Times

Kigali — Victoire Umuhoza Ingabire, the embattled leader of the yet-to-be registered political party, FDU-Inkingi, was yesterday arrested and arraigned before Gasabo Intermediate Court.

Ingabire is charged with association with a terrorist group, propagating the Genocide Ideology, Revisionism and Ethnic Division.

Clad in a grey suit and holding a black handbag, Ingabire arrived in court at around 3.30pm and headed straight to a prosecution room where she stayed for about half an hour before appearing in the courtroom.

She and her lawyer, Protais Mutembe, listened attentively as the representative from the National Public Prosecution Authority read the three charges before the Vice President of the court, Maurice Mbishibishi.

Ingabire is also accused of promoting the genocide ideology through her declarations and speeches made while she was still living in Europe and upon arrival in the country, which contravenes articles 1-4 of the 2008 law against Genocide Ideology.

Prosecutor General, Martin Ngoga, dismissed claims from Ingabire's camp that she was being persecuted for her political views.

"The prosecution's case against Ms Ingabire is based on facts and evidence," said Ngoga, adding that being a politician did not place her above the law.

The East African

"The actions that led to these charges against Ms Ingabire are extremely serious and cannot go unpunished".

Prosecution pointed to a speech she delivered at Kigali Memorial Centre at Gisozi, upon her arrival, where she lamented that the memorial site only honours the Genocide against the Tutsi but Hutus were left out.

It added that through her declarations and utterances, Ingabire not only engaged in Genocide denial, but also promoted ethnic divisionism.

Since her arrival in January, Ingabire has uttered revisionist statements suggesting that there was double Genocide in 1994.

She has also, in her declarations, appealed for ethnic sentiments in her quest for political support.

It was revealed that Ingabire had been in constant contact with the rebels based in Eastern DRC with the aim of forming armed groups to attack Rwanda.

According to the Prosecution, Ingabire while still in Europe shuttled between Amsterdam and Kinshasa to meet top FDLR commanders who she was trying to convince to quit the militia and launch a new offensive under FDU Inkingi/CDF.

The prosecution maintains that Ingabire met Lt. Col Tharcisse Mutwende in 2008 to convince him to leave the rebel group, mainly Ex-FAR Interahamwe, and also sent him money through Western Union. Ingabire claimed she did not know the said FDLR officer or having travelled to Kinshasa to meet the group.

Her bail application will be decided today.

Rwanda: The Icon of the Struggle for Freedom, Democracy and Justice in Arrested

The New Times

Press release

The UDF – Inkingi Support Committee condemns in the strongest terms possible the arrest this morning of the party Chair, Mrs. Victoire Ingabire Umuhoya, for her views on how to bring about genuine national reconciliation and peace through the rule of law and equal opportunity and how to end the cycle of political violence through a non violent, peaceful democratic competition for and exercise of power.

We know that this violent arrest will not deter her determination, instead it prompts the struggle of this freedom icon to a higher level.

It is a tragedy for Rwanda that a call for justice for all Rwandans irrespective of political and ethnic affiliation and for an all inclusive national dialogue to give their views on how to put in place institutions that reassure every Rwandans is turned into accusations of: genocide ideology, divisionism and collaboration with a terrorist organization FDLR.

Such a barbaric and unlawful act against a peace loving mother who braved the system to show that there is another way to bring about lasting peace and development in Rwanda is not only a challenge to the conscience and dignity of the Rwandan people but also to the international community, in particular foreign governments who are sponsoring the government.

It is an irony and a challenge to the international community that this is happening at a time when the Governor General of Canada, a lady herself and whose government was not only at the forefront of countries that sponsored Rwanda to join the commonwealth on the grounds that it meets democratic standards and other values of that organization, is visiting the country. During the visit she is scheduled to meet the women and men of Kibirizi and participate in a discussion on the growing participation of women in Rwandan society.

We call upon governments and peace loving people and organizations to support us in getting our chair immediately and unconditionally released.

For the UDF INKINGI Support Committee.
Eugene Ndahayo, President.

Rwanda: Top Army Generals Arrested

Daily Nation on the Web

Nairobi — Two of Rwanda's most senior army officials were arrested after a major shake-up in the military was announced by President Paul Kagame.

Lieutenant-General Charles Muhire and Major-General Emmanuel Karenzi Karake were suspended from duty and arrested, according to the country's military spokesperson, Jill Rutaremara.

"Lt-Gen Muhire was suspended due to serious charges of corruption and misuse of office," Rutaremara told reporters in Rwanda. "Maj-Gen Karenzi was suspended on serious charges of immoral conduct."

Lt-Gen Muhire was formerly the head of Rwanda's air force while Maj-Gen Karenzi was one of the country's highest ranking soldiers and a member of the military's ruling elite.

The arrests come months after a series of grenade attacks hit Rwanda, one coming just a day after President Kagame declared that a coup d'etat could never be pulled off in the country.

Local media had reported that Maj-Gen Karenzi was questioned over the attacks, which were eventually pinned on other renegade generals.

"This action was taken in order to enforce discipline, moral conduct, and accountability in the Rwanda Defence Force," Rutaremara said.

Earlier this month, Lt-Gen Muhire was deposed from his job in a major shake-up of the country's security and intelligence services. The move came during the commemoration week for the anniversary of the Rwandan genocide.

President Kagame's Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) ended the genocide in 1994 by defeating the then government and took over power. Many of Rwanda's current government officials fought alongside President Kagame and the former rebel group RPF remains largely intact.

Maj-Gen Karenzi, who held one of the highest positions in the military, grew up in Uganda as a refugee and attended Makerere University along with most of the people in government. For nearly two decades, they fought together and rebuilt Rwanda.

The latest arrests and the previous fleeing of other high-ranking generals signal a fissure in what has been seen as a tight-knit group of leadership.

Rwanda: Canada Apologizes Over Genocide

The New Times

Urugwiro Village — Canada's Governor General, Michaëlle Jean, yesterday apologized on behalf of her government for the indifference and inaction of the international community in the lead up to, and during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Jean made the formal apology during her meeting with President Paul Kagame at Urugwiro Village in Kacyiru.

While delivering her message, the top official noted that Canada and other countries failed to respond adequately to the atrocities that were taking place in Rwanda, despite warnings from individuals like Gen. Romeo Dallaire.

"Canada as part of the community acknowledges its fair share of responsibility. I think we could have made a difference. I think we could have prevented the magnitude of the horror that brought Genocide here," Jean said.

"So it is with a sense of utmost humility that I express the respects of Canada to all Rwandans who perished, suffered and continue to suffer the immeasurable loss of the Genocide."

Jean's remarks come at a time the country is commemorating 16 years after the tragic events.

The Canadian Governor General added that April 7, was also declared by her country's parliament as a day for remembering the victims of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, reminding that it is also a time to reflect upon the lessons of the Genocide.

In relation to the country's recovery process, Jean noted that Rwanda has made remarkable progress as regards championing female representation in politics.

"Rwanda is a world leader in terms of women's participation in the decision making process with 56 percent in the national assembly, in fact our discussions here included giving women the power to respect their dignity and making a commitment to emphasize this elsewhere."

President Kagame said that during the meeting, general issues affecting the region as regards peace, stability and development of the people in the region were discussed.

Kagame also responded to questions raised by international press on issues regarding the suspension of the Umuseso and Umuvigizi newspapers where he emphasized that the country's media fraternity should not be judged based on these two publications.

"You are talking about two yet we have close to 20 independent, privately owned fm radios, close to 70 newspapers with others belonging to different countries. Why are these two defining us?" the President asked.

Responding to a question by a Canadian journalist, who wondered why the remarkable development he has seen in the country is at odds with what western media have been reporting, Kagame pointed out that a lot of what is portrayed about Rwanda in the media does not reflect the reality.

"If you read what is said out there, you would think this country does not exist like it didn't exist 16 years ago," he said. "But when you reach here, you should be able to judge. There is a lot happening in rebuilding the nation. It could not be possible for Rwanda to make that happen if what Rwanda is being accused of from outside was to be true".

President Kagame, added that there would be no development, peace, security and rule of law if the things Rwanda is accused of, were accurate.

The Governor General also addressed a long standing issue regarding the complicated procedure of accessing Canadian visas citing that this will be addressed soon since mobility is a major factor of cooperation amongst countries.

The two leaders also affirmed continuity of the strong partnership especially in areas of development, improving health and developing human dignity - a fundamental resource.

Government Has no Evidence against Me, Says Rwanda Opposition Leader

VOA

The leader of Rwanda's opposition United Democratic Forces (UDF) says President Paul Kagame's government is determined to prevent her from participating in the upcoming election scheduled for August 9.

Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza, who was released Thursday after being accused of collaborating with a terrorist group and denying Rwanda's genocide said she is currently under house arrest.

"I am glad that I am home but you know that I am free but on condition. I don't have my passport, they took it and I don't have to go out of Kigali. And of course I have two times in a month I have to go and report to the police," she said.

Ingabire was arrested Wednesday after she was accused of genocide denial and having strong ties to the mainly Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebel group operating in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo.

President Kagame's government has often accused the FDLR of playing a part in the country's 1994 genocide in which hundreds of thousands of Rwandans were killed in a 100-day massacre.

Ingabire said her life is currently not in danger despite her arrest.

"I don't think so. The only problem is that I don't have any freedom; I cannot go where I want, I cannot do what I want and that is something my lawyer will take a look at. We can ask that I can keep my freedom," Ingabire said.

She denied the allegations against her, saying the government has so far failed to provide evidence linking her to the charges.

"Nothing has changed. First the prosecutor said they don't have any evidence against me, but that they need more time to check where they can find evidence. I talked to him and for two months they have been investigating if you didn't find anything what do you want? It is clear that it is the political process not criminal because you are forcing to get evidence," she said.

Ingabire said she is being politically intimidated despite the lack of evidence to support the charges against her.

She was recently prevented from travelling abroad after police said she was under investigation because of comments she made about the 1994 genocide.

Shortly after returning to Rwanda, Ingabire called for the prosecution of those responsible for the death of Hutus during the genocide.

But a group of genocide survivors called on the government to prosecute the opposition leader, saying her pronouncement belittled the genocide in which hundreds of thousands of Rwandans were killed.

Ingabire said she is being targeted for having a different opinion about the genocide. "There is one truth in Rwanda. There was genocide against Tutsis but there were also humanity crimes against Hutus and we have to accept that and we have to find a solution to that...what I'm asking is a dialogue that we can talk about it and to see what we can do to prevent future violence," Ingabire said

Rwanda: Ingabire Granted Bail

The New Times

Victoire Umuhoza Ingabire, the embattled leader of the yet-to-be-registered political party, FDU-Inkingi, was yesterday released on bail following her arrest and arraignment before court on Wednesday.

A seemingly relieved Ingabire smiled and shook hands with the prosecutor after the Vice president of Gasabo Intermediate Court, Maurice Mbishibishi, granted her bail.

She was ordered to report to the prosecution, once a week and stay within the confines of Kigali City.

Ingabire is charged with association with a terrorist group, propagating the Genocide Ideology, Revisionism and Divisionism.

Ingabire, this time without her lawyer, arrived in court at around 11.30 a.m. and headed straight to the courtroom, full of, mainly, journalists.

Looking pensive, Ingabire listened attentively as the judge read the court decision to grant her bail, despite the prosecution insisting that she should be temporarily detained as investigations continue.

"From what you told court yesterday, and the assurance you gave that you will not escape, court has decided to allow you to continue answering charges from outside detention," Judge Mbishibishi said.

"You will be required to report to prosecution every Monday and cooperate with police. You will also be obliged to stay within Kigali."

"I am pleased by the decision of the court," she said as she entered into a waiting vehicle.

However, the prosecution said it was not happy with the court's decision to grant her bail.

"We still have ample time to appeal against this decision but we are definitely not happy," Richard Muhumuza, the Prosecutor at Gasabo Court told the press.

2. Peace keeping/ Conflict Resolution and Security matters

Congo-Kinshasa: UN Envoy Promises Increased Civilian Protection in Northwest

UN News Service

The top United Nations envoy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has pledged to strengthen its military presence in the northwestern province of Equateur to help the Government provide better protection for civilians following a deadly raid by rebels earlier this month on the regional capital.

Alan Doss, Special Representative of the Secretary General for DRC and head of MONUC, the UN peacekeeping force there, made the pledge when he visited Equateur's provincial capital, Mbandaka, yesterday to show solidarity with the local people, provincial officials and UN staff in the city. He offered condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the attack, which took place on 4-5 April.

A UN peacekeeper, two contractors and reportedly several other people died in the attack, which mainly targeted the airport at Mbandaka.

Mr. Doss held several meetings with officials of the provincial administration, including the Governor of Equateur and the regional commander of DRC's national army. He also met representatives of the international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the UN country team in the area.

He condemned the use of all forms of violence and urged insurgents to lay down their arms and respect the law and democratic institutions. Mr. Doss pointed out that Equateur is one of DRC's poorest provinces and said residents of the province needed development not war.

Mr. Doss urged both civilian and military authorities in Mbandaka to work to restore trust between the public and soldiers and the police, stressing the importance of respecting human rights.

Recent clashes in Equateur have pitted ethnic Enyele militiamen against their Munzaya rivals. The violence has caused the displacement of tens of thousands of people.

3. Human Rights/ Social Issues

Rape in DRC Reaches Alarming Levels

VOA

The United Nations refugee agency says it is alarmed at the large numbers of women who continue to be victims of rape and sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The UNHCR says more than one third of recorded cases of rape, in the first three months of 2010, are in North and South Kivu provinces in eastern DRC, which hosts some 1.4 million internally displaced people.

During the first three months of this year, United Nations data shows 1,244 women were sexually assaulted throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo. That averages almost 14 assaults every day.

U.N. refugee spokeswoman, Melissa Fleming, says a similar number of sexual assaults were recorded in the same period last year. So, the situation is not getting better.

"We do fear that the real numbers, of course, could be much higher because we are aware that many of the survivors do keep silent on this-on their trauma," said Fleming. "We are really disturbed by the lack of justice and prevailing impunity. We consider sexual violence among the most serious of crimes and should be treated as such. Survivors should be helped to report incidents without fear of reprisals."

Fleming says women often are raped when they venture out of their villages or camps to collect firewood, water and other essential means to survive.

The UNHCR runs camps for 100,000 internally displaced people in Kivu province. Fleming says the UNHCR is doing its utmost to reduce the exposure of women in the camps. In North Kivu, for example, she says the agency provides fuel-efficient stoves and firewood so the women do not have to leave safe areas.

DRC President Joseph Kabila has told the United Nations that it wants its large force of peacekeepers to leave the country. The U.N. force has been in the country for 11 years and is widely credited with preventing some of the worst abuses.

Fleming says security for women in the Congo is absolutely vital. She says the UNHCR is seriously concerned that rape will increase if measures of security are reduced.

"We do have evidence and hear from IDP's [camps for internally displaced persons] that the presence of MONUC troops [peacekeeping troops] has given them a greater sense of security," said the spokeswoman. "And that in places where peacekeepers are, we do have indications that their presence on patrol brings down security incidents, it brings down the reported cases of rape."

Fleming says the UNHCR provides rape victims with counseling, medical treatment and legal advice. She says in a few cases, women have received legal redress.

But, she notes the overall number of cases in which criminal charges are brought is tiny compared to the vast scale of the problem. In DRC at least 200,000 cases of sexual violence have been recorded since 1996.

Funding gap threatens response to child measles outbreak in West, Central Africa – UN

UN News Service

23 April 2010 – Countries in West and Central Africa have been hit by a measles outbreak affecting more than 22,000 children, with a shortage of resources for immunizations threatening to roll back progress on curbing child mortality in the region, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has warned.

A funding shortfall of \$16 million for follow-up vaccination campaigns jeopardizes the health of children in Africa, including the 16 nations in the throes of the latest outbreak, according to the agency.

In most West and Central African countries, only 80 percent or less of their populations have been immunized, short of the 95 per cent recommended by the UN World Health Organization (WHO).

“Such a figure means they can expect to have large, sustained outbreaks every three to four years” said the agency’s Regional Director for Africa, Luis Gomes Sambo.

Nearly 200 child deaths from measles have been reported in the 16 nations affected by the outbreak in the past year.

“We fail to vaccinate every child. That is why we have a pool of susceptible victims which builds up as a perfect breeding ground for measles outbreaks,” according to UNICEF’s Director for West and Central Africa, Gianfranco Rotigliano.

Measles are among the world’s most contagious diseases, easily spread through coughing or sneezing, and is one of the leading causes of death among children around the world.

Last year, a major outbreak in Burkina Faso killed 340 people and caused more than 50,000 to get sick, while more than 16,000 other cases and 68 deaths were reported in Benin, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Senegal.

The UN has sought to slash deaths from measles by 90 per cent in the decade between 2000 and 2010, but the world body’s agencies stressed that if nothing is done to counter the resurgence of the disease, progress made so far will be reversed.

“The funding gap must be met so that countries can continue to undertake large-scale campaigns to prevent child deaths and sustain the gains,” Mr. Sambo of WHO said. “Reaching the 2010 goal will also require strengthening routine immunization and disease surveillance systems to rapidly detect and control outbreaks.”

Immunization and follow-up vaccination campaigns, funding permitting, are planned this year in Burkina Faso, Congo, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

“Our work is not over. We need a sustained political and financial commitment to fight this leading killer of children. We cannot drop our guard,” said UNICEF’s Mr. Rotigliano.

UN Agency Alarmed by Continued Sexual Violence Against Women in DRC

VOA

Recent data from the UNHCR shows that women and girls in The Democratic Republic of Congo continue to be sexually assaulted throughout the country at an average of almost 14-assaults each day since the beginning of the year.

The agency is alarmed by the large number of rapes that have persisted over the years, and how rape continues to be used as a weapon against women, even after the civil war. Fatoumata Lejuen-Kaba, spokesperson for the UNHCR, says even though the civil war is over, there are still some very volatile regions in the country.

“Today even in areas where there is no war going on, you still have lots of rape cases reported. That is why we are very much alarmed. There is total impunity, lack of justice. We think this makes it easier for people to just continue raping as they’ve done in the past,” says Lejuen-Kaba.

UN data shows that during the first three months of this year, 1,244 women were sexually assaulted throughout the country. That’s about fourteen assaults a day.

Lejeune-Kaba says, “To curtail this, we’re trying to minimize vulnerable women’s exposure to dangerous situations where they get raped. For example, in the camps, we know that when women venture out to go get wood or water, they are raped. So we provide them with firewood or fuel-efficient stoves, for example. But overall not enough is being done.”

She says women and girls who are sexually assaulted, in addition to the physical trauma and exposure to violence, feel shame and hurt, rather than harboring a sense of anger toward the rapist. The women are often abandoned by their husbands and families and are left to cope with the crime alone.

“We are trying to make sure that rape is recognized as crime, and they are prosecuted—so we provide legal assistance. For example, in south Kivu province, the number of rape incidences is really high. We’ve helped 145 survivors file complaints in local courts and as a result, there are 24 men charged and they were sentenced to jail terms. Some of them were ordered to pay compensation. And we are running an information campaign to inform husbands and police officers that the woman is a victim and shouldn’t be held responsible,” says Lejeune-Kaba.

Lejeune-Kaba added there have been positive responses from the information campaign, with still a long way to go.

4. US-Africa

Rwanda: Africa Action Denounces Arrest of Rwandan Opposition Leader, Calls for U.S. Condemnation

Africa Action (Washington, DC)

Press release

Africa Action, an organization that has stood in principled solidarity with the struggle for human rights, democracy and economic justice in Africa since 1953, strongly condemns the arrest of Rwandan opposition leader Victoire Ingabire.

The arrest of Ms. Ingabire follows a series of intimidation and harassment of opposition leaders. On February 3rd, Ms. Ingabire and her aid Joseph Ntawangundi were assaulted while collecting documents necessary for the party’s registration. During the attack Ms. Ingabire’s passport was stolen and Mr. Ntawangundi was severely beaten.

Today Ms. Ingabire is currently imprisoned on charges of “genocide ideology, divisionism and cooperating with the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda.”

Africa Action calls U.S. government to condemn the human rights violation and that the Rwandan Government to take immediate steps to respect the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly of opposition parties. The arrest appears to be a continuation of a troubling but predictable trend in several African countries where strong ties with the U.S. military are coinciding with the elimination of democratic processes and the arrests of political opposition leaders.

Gerald LeMelle, Executive Director of Africa Action said today, “This is a perfect illustration of when a key U.S. military satellite country in Africa, such as Rwanda, openly mocks the U.S. government’s stated interests in human rights and democracy. Sadly, the U.S. silence on this speaks volumes.”

Africa Action notes that while Rwanda has demonstrated leadership in social development and economic recovery in the region, militarily, they have been tied to the

violence and destabilization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and politically, there has been a rapid decline of constructive engagement with civil society and political opposition parties over the past few months. These developments are indications that the U.S. Government must reconsider its relationship with President Kagame, and demand that human rights and democratic principles of accountability are a priority for the Rwandan Government.

5. Pan Africa

Africa: Rwanda Elected to Chair AU Ministerial Council

The New Times

Kigali — The third ordinary session of the conference of the African Union (AU) on youth, that sat in Zimbabwe recently elected Rwanda to the chair the Conference of Ministers in Charge of Youth (COMMYIII) for the next two years.

The Minister of Youth, Protais Mitali, attributed Rwanda's election to its initiative in developing and implementing the African Youth Charter.

"Rwanda is among the few countries in Africa, with a well-established youth council that emphasises the need to ensure that young people are educated, in order to enable them to carry forward the development process," he said

"The country has mobilized efforts that are meant for devising and implementing policies and programs specifically intended for the youth and which are integrated in all sectors".

He added that the Rwanda was recognised for its good leadership that has led to her development within the past 16 years.

"During our term of office, we shall make sure that the AU commission and member states continue efforts to popularize and implement the charter," he noted.

Mitali explained that the seat will motivate the Rwandan youth to harness new strategies and tools to have their voices heard at the continental level.

Among the various recommendations of the meeting and also being one of the mandates of the chair, is to ensure that AU member states that have not signed and or ratified the charter to do so urgently.

The forum commended the United Nations for adopting 2010 as the international year of youth under the theme "Dialogue and mutual understanding."

During the meeting AU member states were urged to harmonise their national youth program and projects with the plan of action for the decade 2009-2018 and commended efforts towards the revitalisation of the Pan African Youth union.

Central African Integration Limited by Domestic Differences

VOA

New CEMAC parliament inaugurated but lack of fiscal coordination, uneven business and visa regulations hamper cooperation.

Central African leaders have high hopes for a new regional parliament. But the lack of fiscal coordination and differences in immigration law continue to make the group less competitive than the neighboring Economic Community of West African States.

Heads of state from the Central Africa Economic and Monetary Community inaugurated their new parliament with a gala opening last week. The \$30 million, Chinese-built assembly in Equatorial Guinea gives a new home and new mandate to a body that began as an inter-parliamentary commission 10 years ago.

Cameroon, Gabon, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic and Chad each have five delegates to oversee the functioning and budget of a CEMAC Commission charged with promoting democracy and accelerating regional integration.

Cameroon's Antoine Ntsimi, president of the commission, says the most urgent issues facing CEMAC and its new parliament are fighting poverty, easing the movement of people, and better harnessing the region's oil wealth.

Equatorial Guinea, the Congo Republic, Chad, and Gabon are among Africa's top ten oil producers, yet CEMAC's 30 million people remain among the world's poorest.

Equatorial Guinea President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo says the new regional parliament in Malabo will better serve the region's people.

President Obiang says the new parliament will help the CEMAC commission consolidate peace, safeguard collective security, promote the development of democracy and good governance and improve national reconciliation.

He says greater economic and political integration will transform the region, increasing private-sector investment and raising the living standards of everyone.

But there is still no fiscal coordination between CEMAC members on budgeting or planning. And foreign investors say business regulations in the region vary widely.

"When there is economic and regional integration, there is usually some convergence criteria that they put in place, which may be related to the rate of inflation or related to fiscal deficits and so on," says economics professor Baye Mengjo, who teaches at the University of Yaounde. "Some countries may not really want to be committed in trying to

implement those things because they involve some adjustment policies that have to take place in their various countries."

Unlike citizens of the neighboring, 15-member Economic Community of West African States, CEMAC citizens are not permitted to travel freely within the alliance.

"If you are talking about integration, talking about economic cooperation, if a citizen from country A has to seek for a visa - and even at times unsuccessfully - to get into the other country, then what are we talking about?" Mengjo asked.

The West African economic bloc has a regional stock exchange in Abidjan. In Central Africa, there is no link between the stock markets in Libreville and Douala.

Mengjo says CEMAC is also weakened by a multitude of bilateral agreements with European and Asian governments that sometimes pit one member's economy against another because they all more or less produce the same things.

"All those factors are themselves working against regional integration, especially in the CEMAC region where the individual countries and their authorities are not very committed [to] developing a market among themselves. The trade between the CEMAC member countries is very very small," Mengjo said.

The International Monetary Fund estimates CEMAC's intra-regional trade accounts for less than two percent of members' exports. It remains a regional body held together largely by a common currency backed by France and pegged to the Euro.

6. Economy and Energy

Rwanda: Gov't Targets Rwf4 Billion Tax Revenue from Cigarettes

The New Times

Kigali — Government has recorded large sums of tax revenue from alcohol, and tobacco products, data from the Rwanda Revenue Authority has showed.

Figures presented to Business Times indicate that last year government collected Rwf952 million from wines and liquors and Rwf3 billion from cigarettes. About Rwf12 billion was also raised from imported cars.

According to RRA data, government expects to raise some Rwf4 billion from smokers by the end of this year but the figure is subjected to change.

Government had sharply increased taxes on cigarettes to discourage consumption, but consumers say the increase in prices has not affected their habits.

It is expected that higher cigarette prices encourage smokers to quit, reduce the number of cigarettes smoked, and prevent initiation among potential new users.

Tobacco taxes on Cost Insurance and Flight (CIF) was increased from 120 to 150 percent, while beer, wines and liquor stand at 60 and 70 percent.

Prices of Embassy, Intore and SM cigarettes manufactured by British American Tobacco Rwanda (BAT Rwanda) prices ranges from Rwf25 to Rwf50 per stick.

Women Farmers Can Play Big Role in Reducing World Hunger, says New Report

VOA

"...in places like Africa where the hunger problem is most severe, women produce most of the food."

Women farmers hold the "key" to sharply reducing world hunger, according to a new report from the humanitarian organization Action Aid.

The release of the report – Fertile Ground -- coincides with a European Union meeting Wednesday in Brussels to revive efforts to achieve the Millennium Developments Goals (MDGs).

It's estimated there are about one-billion people who go hungry every day. A Millennium Development Goal is to reduce that number by half by 2015.

Peter O'Driscoll, executive director of ActionAid USA, says there are a number of reasons to invest in women farmers.

"First and foremost, particularly in places like Africa where the hunger problem is most severe, women produce most of the food. In some countries 70, 80 even 90 percent of the food people consume is produced by women small farmers," he says.

However, he says these women lack the necessary tools and resources.

"Investment in agriculture, investment in land, credit and so forth are simply not available for women farmers. So, what we're trying to insist is that it's crucial not only that governments increase the level of spending and investment in agriculture, but that they target it towards women," says O'Driscoll, adding, "If you really want to address the problem of hunger, you have to invest in hungry people in helping them to grow their own food," says O'Driscoll.

The ActionAid USA head estimates there are 800-million smallholder farmers around the world, who produce most of the food consumed in their countries.

Frederic Courbet/Panos Pictures/ActionAid

Regina Jackson, 35, is married with 6 kids in Simotwa village, West Pokot, Kenya. She part of ActionAid efforts to help smallholder farmers.

“But it’s also important to note that when we talk about a billion hungry people in the world, probably 60 percent of those are smallholder farmers and another 20 percent are landless rural workers. So, clearly, the folks who are growing the food are also those who are experiencing the most chronic hunger,” he says.

In Africa, women make up the majority of these smallholder farmers. But O’Driscoll says men and women often produce food for different reasons.

“Men, who have better access to credit and better access to extension services, tend to produce cash crops for market, whereas women actually grow the food that their families will be eating.”

Investing

O’Driscoll says it’s now generally accepted that it was a mistake to reduce investment in agriculture over the past 25 years or so.

“There was an idea that if we simply got the government out of agriculture, and allow the private sector to come in, we’d have a more efficient and effective food system. Unfortunately, the results are that number of hungry people has actually dramatically increased over that time,” he says.

In Uganda, Victoria Ddundu, 46, a widow and mother of 5, walks with her children in a village in Palisa. Her family relies on the food she grows. Besides investing more money, the ActionAid official says it should also be more targeted.

“We should be targeting that aid on the kinds of inputs that are most useful to those women,” he says.

This includes access to credit and agricultural extension services, which aim to improve the economic, environmental and social conditions of the farmers.

“Even where extension services are available, they tend to focus on the richer farmers, who have access to markets. They’re not reaching the kind of women who are actually growing the food that people need to escape from hunger,” he says.

Tiny farms

Many women farmers grow food on small patches of land. But O’Driscoll says that land can be made more productive.

“For many years the conventional wisdom has been that these pieces of land are too small and too unproductive and, therefore, not worth farming at all,” he says.

That attitude contributed to a “dramatic exodus from rural areas to cities.” But things are changing.

“There’s a tremendous body of evidence that investment in sustainable agricultural techniques - in multi-cropping, diversified cropping, in agro-ecological composting and various other forms of low cost, low external input agriculture – can actually be extremely productive,” he says.

2015

Would investing in smallholder women farmers help achieve the Millennium Development Goal to halve hunger around the world by 2015.?

O’Driscoll says, “I think as a global community we simply have to take that as an imperative. I think it’s probably now almost...35 years that the international community has been promising to halve the number of hungry people,” he says.

He says the question is not whether it can be done, but how the world commits to doing it.

“As this report makes pretty clear, there is a number of dimensions. One is we do need to see a dramatic increase...in public investment in agriculture. And that means not only from African countries or developing countries themselves...but I think it’s clearly important for the donor community...to step up their giving,” he says.

The EU meeting in Brussels aims to come up with a “rescue” plan for the MDGs.

7. Elections and Governness

Gabon opposition union legalised

Afrol News

Gabon's opposition National Union party, uniting several major parties since March, has finally been recognized by authorities and can function officially as a political party. It will be Gabon's main opposition party.

The National Union party was founded in Libreville on 10 March as a union of many of Gabon's main opposition parties. Amongst its leaders is André Mba Obame, who was an independent candidate at the August 2009 presidential elections in Gabon, where he polled second with 26 percent of the votes.

The aim of the large opposition merger was to finally put an end to factionism in the country, which has allowed the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) to stay in power in election after election. While Gabonese polls since the introduction of multi-party elections in 1990 have been neither free nor fair, the opposition never before managed to unite against ex-President Omar Bongo and his son, current President Ali Bongo.

Since the foundation last month, controversy has surrounded the National Union. Mr Mba Obame was accused of favouring a military coup in Gabon after he compared the situation of "general discontent" in the country with the situation in Niger.

Party President Zacharie Myboto had to downplay Mr Mba Obame's statements, saying he feared government would use them as an excuse to deny the new party's official registration.

An official recognition has been a slow process. But the Gabonese Minister of the Interior yesterday finally had signed the order to register the new party. Some signatures from the National Union however still had to be collected, according to the Ministry.

According to the Ministry and the opposition party, the registration of the National Union was just in time for the party to participate in by-elections for the Libreville parliament to be held in eight constituencies on 6 June. The new party still has to meet a one-week deadline to present its candidates to these by-elections.

Rwanda: Media Vital for Democracy

Huye — Journalism is an ultimate tool that strengthens democracy and helps establish a society that respects the rights of all, Michalle Jean, the Governor General of Canada, has said.

In her keynote address at the National University of Rwanda on the role of media in a democracy, the Governor General said that journalism is an ideal when it is practiced with concern for the truth and common good.

"Journalism is about awareness, providing food for thought, asking questions about what has been passed over in silence, encouraging the expression and confrontation of ideas, opening hearts to realities that call for action," she said.

"It is an ideal of democracy which we need to strive towards with all our strength and try to maintain it at its highest level.

She reiterated the need for responsible journalism in emerging democracies like Rwanda which is working on fostering unity and reconciliation after Genocide while at the same

time recognizing the responsibility of journalists in Rwanda which is trying to rebuild, to restore the ties of trust so brutally and bloodily broken.

The Haitian born Governor General, who also worked for the Canada Public television for 18 years, advised media professionals in Rwanda to exercise their independence in a way that does not obstruct efforts towards unity and reconciliation.

"Only on that condition can words testify to the truth, awaken consciences, foster openness and allow for dialogue that leads to healing and genuine reconciliation," she said

Jean called for vigilance as she paid tribute to the over 500 students and staff who perished at the University during the Genocide.

"It is very hard for me to imagine that even the students were involved in the killing of their own classmates," she said.

The Governor General's visit at the University was also characterised by a panel discussion on: "the role of media in a democracy." Media trainers, practitioners, regulators and students engaged in open discussions on the media in Rwanda, its challenges and future prospects.

The recent suspension of two vernacular tabloids; Umuseso and Umuvugizi attracted hot debate on the independence of the media. Arthur Asimwe, the board chairman of the Media High Council said that media freedom comes with responsibility. He said that after getting numerous complaints from readers, the council tried to engage the heads of the two papers in a dialogue but were ignored.

"We are there [media high council] to ensure that the law is respected, but we are also there to ensure that freedom of the press is maintained, so you do not talk of the freedom of the press if people adamantly refuse to adhere to what the law says," Asimwe said.

Rwanda's Minister of foreign affairs, Louise Mushikiwabo, commended the work of some media houses which she said have worked to mobilize local communities for development.

Commenting on the issue of the suspended Umuseso and Umuvugizi tabloids, Mushikiwabo expressed displeasure with the kind of stories that two papers publishing.

"I have read some of these papers and I am outraged, as somebody who want to see this country move forward with very good, very healthy and very critical journalism, that a newspaper would be calling for a mutiny in the army, calling for Rwandans not to pay their taxes and predicting war in a few months, " Mushikiwabo said.

The Governor General later in the day, in Nyamagabe district, was briefed on the activities of the Programme d'Appui à la Gouvernance locale du Rwanda (PAGOR), a project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

It supports the Rwandan decentralization policy by strengthening local governance in two districts of the Southern Province; Nyamagabe and Nyaruguru. She later held a closed door discussion with women in Gender committees in Kibilizi Sector.

The Governor General was accompanied by; Foreign Affairs Minister, Louise Mushikiwabo, the Minister in the President's office, Solina Nyirahabimana, Rwanda's High Commissioner to Canada, Edda Mukabagwiza, Gender and Family promotion Minister, Jeanne d'Arc Mujawamariya, and the Governor of the Southern Province among others.

Rwanda: A Bucket of Cold Water for Kigali's Overheated Press

East African

Opinion

Nairobi — Here is a sample of typical headlines in Rwandan newspapers: "Ruling party leading the country into darkness"; "The five mental illnesses of Kagame"; "Kagame and Hitler are one and the same"; "Army officers ready to slaughter thousands ..."

And that is just on the days when the news is slow for the likes of Umuseso, Umuco, Umuvugizi, Umurabyo and other "U" newspapers that are published mainly in the vernacular Kinyarwanda.

When it really gets hot - like when the government of Burundi arrested a Rwandan fugitive, Deo Mushayidi, and handed him to Rwandan police - you can be sure our "U" sheets will outdo any fringe publication in the quality of alarming headlines generated.

"Rwanda police enter Burundi to kidnap Mushayidi," says a headline in one of the papers followed by this kicker: "Burundi sovereign space violated by Rwanda."

And when General Kayumba Nyamwasa, former army chief of staff and former ambassador to India, decided to flee the country rather than submit to questioning in a police investigation of grenade attacks in Kigali, the "U" publications were almost anonymous in concluding that Kayumba left because "Kagame had ordered the man shot"! Other media organizations, of course, report differently.

Burundi police arrested the fugitive Mushayidi because he was using a forged Burundian passport. When they questioned him, it turned out he was a wanted man in Rwanda. So the Burundian authorities in co-operation with Rwanda Police drove Mushayidi to the border and handed him over. No Burundian talked of kidnapping or "violation of sovereign space."

No one knows how Umuvugizi decided that President Kagame would order a general shot like a rabid dog. Or how Umuseso arrived at the conclusion that a country lauded internationally for making an astonishing recovery from the terrible events of the genocide, is actually "being led into the darkness."

But our "U" papers are not content to peddle only the alarmist or sensational. Incitement is generally part of the mix. Here is the closing paragraph of a typical feature piece in one of the papers: "Without a doubt, Rwandans need to rise up; they need to take up arms and fight this bad regime!"

No, I am not talking about an article in a Rwandan newspaper in 1994, the period that marked the rock bottom for the country's media. I am talking about issue no. 374 of August 2009 of Umuseso, a Kigali-based newspaper.

People still agonise about the role our media played in inciting the population during the genocide. Apparently we have not made much progress in the quality of our media since 1994.

Of course, publications like our "U" papers can be found anywhere. The difference with Rwanda is that elsewhere such newspapers are on the fringe. Here they are the mainstream. Elsewhere, people's primary sources of news and opinion are not newspapers with deranged front-page allegations that the head of state has a lot in common with Adolf Hitler.

Rwanda, due to various historical circumstances too many to go into here, has never developed into a big media market. So the sensationalists and charlatans made inroads and captured significant readerships - especially in the Kinyarwanda language.

Every time anyone raises an objection, they cry "persecution" or "media repression," and raise Reporters Without Borders and other international pressure groups who put pressure on Kigali and talk about the need to respect media freedoms. So Kigali shuts up.

But last week saw the straw that broke the camel's back - two papers alleged that the army chief of staff and several other officers were in jail. But that very day, the alleged jailbirds were on TV, one of them, James Kabarebe, being made minister of defence and the other, James Kayonga, being promoted to army chief of staff.

The Media High Council slapped a six-month suspension on Umuseso and Umuvugizi for publishing fabrications and violating media ethics.

Shyaka Kanuma is chief editor of the Rwanda Focus.

8. Health

HIV/AIDS Study says Death of a Mother More Detrimental to Children than Loss of the Father

VOA

“We could establish that children who lost their mother before the age of 15 had typically a year less schooling compared to children who didn’t experience these kind of events...”

It’s estimated that 15 million children have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. But research shows the death of the mother to the disease can have a much greater and longer lasting effect on a child than the death of the father.

The study is based on the lives of over 700 children in Kagera, Tanzania from the early 1990s to 2004. Oxford University researchers say they found the role of the mother is “more essential” to the long-term well-being of a child.

Stefan Dercon, professor of development economics at Oxford, says, “Our interest was in trying to start to look at longer term impacts of what’s been happening with the HIV/AIDS crisis.”

Many had believed that the loss of the breadwinner father would have greater consequences because of the economic loss to a family. But that’s not what Dercon and the Oxford team found.

“The impacts of losing a mother were substantially higher and statistically much more significant than anything we could pin down in losing the father in the family,” he says. Not just emotional effects

“We could establish that children who lost their mother before the age of 15 had typically a year less schooling compared to children who didn’t experience these kind of events during their childhood. They similarly were two centimeters shorter than otherwise similar children,” he says.

He describes these effects as significant.

“Given that average schooling is only about five years or five and a half years, that’s a substantially lower level of schooling on average for children who’ve lost their mothers,” he says.

Dercon adds, “Similarly two centimeters is actually quite substantial. I was told not so long ago that’s more or less equivalent to the height gain that was obtained in the U.S. over a 50 year period during the 20th Century. So these are quite big differences.”

And studies show that taller people often earn more money than shorter people and are often considered better at physical labor.

The findings, he says, highlights the “central role that a mother plays in mediating what’s happening in the family.”

“Somehow they tend to know their children better, their nutritional needs, their other needs and so on. And the fact that she’s not present anymore may well have a big impact in the way a child gets the opportunities it gets within the family,” he says.

He calls the role of the mother “crucial in terms of translating resources into the well-being of children,” adding, “It’s just highlighting how important a mother would be in being able to respond much better to the needs of children.

The study also finds that the economic effects of the death of a breadwinner may not be as big as once thought.

“We probably overstated the economic impact of the HIV/AIDS crisis. And that the way the impacts have worked through families has been far more subtle. And in our case we can show it did work via maternal orphanhood, for example, as one of the possible mechanisms, rather than this kind of total dramatic, pure economic income related effects that people have highlighted,” he says.

The findings may lead to new programs to help families affected by the epidemic. “I would be cautious in saying let’s now not give any support to families where the father died and only give it to the families where mothers died. That would be quite wrong to actually conclude from this kind of work. But what we can say is that if we don’t take into account carefully the caring relationships within the family, we’re not really going necessarily to reach the children that are affected directly,” he says.

Dercon says HIV/AIDS has created a generation of children, who may be “disadvantaged for the rest of their lives.”

9. Refuges and Rebels

Fighting in Congo Displaces 100,000 Civilians

VOA

What began as dispute over local fishing rights is now humanitarian crisis for government in Brazzaville, security concern for government in Kinshasa.

Fighting in western provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo has displaced more than 100,000 people. Some are seeking refuge across the border in Congo-Brazzaville where relief officials say they have only enough supplies to feed one-third of the refugees.

Nearly 15,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo live in the Congolese Republic town of Betou along the Oubangui River that separates the countries.

Immigration officer Jean Zoda says he and his family were caught in the crossfire between government troops and ethnic Enyele militiamen who have been fighting across parts of the Dongo region for the past four months.

Zoda says the rebels attacked about seven kilometers from their village, so he and his family fled the following morning. They took all their possessions to the river, but then soldiers arrived and started attacking, so they dropped everything and fled into the forest. He says they stayed in the forest until midnight before they found a boat to cross the river. Zola says they left everything behind.

Relief officials say refugees are spread across more than 80 sites along 500 kilometers of the river. And there has been little humanitarian assistance, with only about one-third of the refugees receiving food rations during the past four months.

Refugee Micheline Alemba used to work as a cook in Dongo. She says her family has been hungry since they arrived in the Congo Republic. There are so many people here, she says they can not find anything to eat. They go into the forest to look for food, but Alemba says there is not much.

"One-hundred-thousand people is really quite a large number of people and the situation is really bad, but of course in times when there are 200,000 dead people in Haiti and looming wars elsewhere and a volcano erupting, there is certain competition between victims, which is unfortunate, which we do not want to foster, but which is a reality of our work and we have to respond to that," explained Corinna Kreidler, who works with the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office.

What began as a dispute over local fishing rights is now a humanitarian crisis for the government in Brazzaville and a security concern for the government in Kinshasa.

Earlier this month, Enyele militiamen launched their boldest attack, landing boats in the capital of Equateur Province and briefly taking control of the governor's office and the airport in Mbandaka.

They were eventually driven back in a joint counter-attack by government troops and U.N. peacekeepers. But the speed with which this rebellion has grown has renewed concerns about the strength of Kinshasa's army with U.N. peacekeepers set to begin withdrawing from western areas in June.

Congolese Information Minister Lambert Mende says government troops are slowly regaining the ability to take responsibility for defending their own country and will be ready by the time U.N. troops complete their gradual withdrawal next year.

The head of Congo's peacekeeping force, Alan Doss, told the Security Council that discipline in the government army is likely to remain a constant concern so long as, what he calls, structural problems in the military remain unresolved. Doss says there are

persistent delays in the payment of salaries and low levels of training for many troops, especially those who have been integrated from various armed groups.