

Report # 129
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Central Africa
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Summary

1. Politics

Rwanda: The Politics of Genocide Denial

Rwandan officials have defended the government of President Paul Kagame against recent criticism that it was cracking down on its opponents and the press ahead of upcoming presidential elections. Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo and Prosecutor General Martin Ngogo reacted to criticism of the government during an event hosted by the Atlantic Council in Washington, DC. The focus of the event was the politics of genocide denial in Rwanda, specifically, and also within the global and historical context. Foreign Minister Mushikiwabo said she believes that the timing of the incidents in Rwanda has played a significant role in the heightened media attention focused on the events. Human rights groups, civil society organizations and the international community, including the United States, have hit out at Rwanda over the recent events and atmosphere leading up to the August election.

2. Peace keeping/ Conflict Resolution and Security matters

Congo-Kinshasa: ICC Puts Release of Warlord on Hold Pending Prosecution Appeal

The appeals chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) suspended the decision by the trials chamber to release war crimes suspect Thomas Lubanga Dyilo of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), pending the determination of the prosecution's appeal of the verdict. Mr. Lubanga Dyilo will, therefore, remain under the custody of the ICC, the appeals chamber ruled.

Congo-Kinshasa: Secretary Clinton on Conflict Minerals in DR-Congo

Last year in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Secretary Clinton spoke out against the trade in "conflict minerals" that has funded a cycle of conflict there that has left more than 5 million people dead since 1998, displaced countless more, and spawned an epidemic of sexual and gender-based violence. President Obama has now signed into law a measure that will require corporations to publicly disclose what they are doing to ensure that their products don't contain these minerals. The DRC has formally expressed its support for this law and has thanked both the executive and legislative branches of our government.

Rebels Attack Army Base in Central African Republic

Rebels in the Central African Republic attacked an army base near the country's border with Sudan. The army said it fought off the attack in the northeastern town of Birao and is now in control of the base.

3. Elections

Burundi Votes in Opposition-Boycotted Election

Voters in Burundi are casting ballots in a parliamentary election the ruling party is almost certain to win, amid a boycott by an opposition coalition. The opposition also boycotted last month's presidential election. Unopposed, President Pierre Nkurunziza was re-elected. The opposition decided to boycott both votes after accusing the president of using fraud to win local elections in May.

Burundi Parliamentary Vote Begins Friday

A leading member of Burundi's opposition Forces for National Liberation (FNL) has called on supporters of his party as well as other opposition parties to boycott the parliamentary election scheduled to begin Friday.

Report Finds Endemic Corruption in Burundi, Uganda and Kenya

The Transparency International survey says the Kenyan Police are the second most corrupt institution in east Africa, falling just behind the police forces of Burundi, the most corrupt country in East Africa, according to the East African Bribery Index 2010.

Rwanda: Kagame's Rally Attracts Record Crowd in Burera

RPF's candidate, Paul Kagame, yesterday, continued his campaign in the Northern Province, addressing tens of thousands of party supporters who had turned up for the campaign rallies in the districts of Burera and Musanze. He commended the residents of Burera for responding positively to government programs of agriculture, health, education, peace and democracy, adding that impressive progress has been made but that there is need to do more.

Rwanda: Opposition Asks Obama, Cameron for Help with 'Political Crisis'

The president of a Rwandan opposition party has written an open letter to US President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron urging them to intervene in what he calls a political crisis in Rwanda.

Campaigning Begins in Rwandan Election

Campaigning has begun in Rwanda for an election expected to return President Paul Kagame to power. Political tensions are high in the country following a series of arrests and killings that targeted opposition figures and journalists. Also, three main opposition parties say authorities did not allow them to register for the August 9 vote. Victoire Ingabire, leader of the unregistered Unified Democratic Forces party says she is ready to

organize a boycott of the elections. Critics have accused President Kagame of stifling opposition and freedom of expression ahead of the poll.

Opposition Leader Urges Rwandans to Boycott August Vote

The leader of Rwanda's unregistered opposition United Democratic Forces said she is ready to organize Rwandans to boycott the upcoming general election scheduled for August 9. Victoire Ingabire says there is no need to waste money and resources to participate in an election that will not be credible. She also claimed that senior officials of the election commission are members of the ruling party.

4. Refugees / IDPs

Congo-Kinshasa: Top UN Officials Voice Hope That Refugees Can Return Home

UN News Service

The top United Nations food and refugee officials today expressed hope that security will soon improve to allow people uprooted by years of conflict in the volatile east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to return home and begin farming their land. WFP is providing food assistance to some 150,000 uprooted people in North Kivu, including nearly 4,000 in three camps around Nyanzale. The vast majority of the inhabitants of the sites are women, most of whom have lost their husbands and many of whom have been raped during years of strife. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) is coordinating humanitarian aid for 84,000 IDPs in 42 camps and is also working to prevent and respond to sexual violence. Since 2007, the agency has helped 106,000 people return to their villages and rebuild their lives.

Congo-Kinshasa: In Country, UN Official Pledges Support to Help Displaced People Return Home

UN news service

The United Nations refugee chief is visiting the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where he has pledged assistance and support for civilians uprooted by fighting to return to their homes and rebuild their lives. Ethnic clashes in Equateur earlier this year caused the displacement of tens of thousands of people, as well as widespread damage to homes and infrastructure. According to UNHCR, fighting between militia groups and the Congolese armed forces, as well as violence against civilians, has displaced some 1.85 million people within the country and created 450,000 refugees - most hosted in neighboring countries. Last year alone, close to 210,000 were displaced from Equateur province both internally, and across to neighboring countries, while over a million other people were displaced in eastern DRC.

5. Pan Africa

Rwanda: UN to Release Global Crisis Report Today

The World Bank and the United Nations (UN) will today release a report showing how the global financial crisis has impacted on economies in the world. The revelation was made yesterday by Patrick Bitature the Chairman of the Uganda Investment Authority during a press briefing at the ongoing African Union (AU) summit in Kampala.

Rwanda: AU Hails Nation for Empowering Women

The African Union (AU) has recognized efforts by the Rwandan government to empower women by giving them access to decision-making positions in the country's political landscape.

1. Politics

Rwanda: The Politics of Genocide Denial

The New Times

Washington, DC — Rwandan officials have defended the government of President Paul Kagame against recent criticism that it was cracking down on its opponents and the press ahead of upcoming presidential elections.

Democratic Green Party Vice Chairman Andre Kagwa Rwisereka was found murdered earlier this month, days before the official kickoff of campaigning, and other members of the political opposition have been arrested.

A journalist, Jean Leonard Rugambage, acting editor of Umuvugizi Newspaper, was gunned down outside his home last month. The government had recently suspended the publication, as well as Umuseso Newspaper, for six months.

Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo and Prosecutor General Martin Ngogo reacted to criticism of the government during an event hosted by the Atlantic Council in Washington, DC, last Tuesday. The focus of the event was the politics of genocide denial in Rwanda, specifically, and also within the global and historical context. The Atlantic Council is a non-partisan network of leaders seeking to promote more effective U.S. foreign policy

Foreign Minister Mushikiwabo said she believes that the timing of the incidents in Rwanda has played a significant role in the heightened media attention focused on the events.

"The impetus [behind the newspaper suspensions] is the illegal behavior of some media practitioners," she said.

Ngoga said it was important to take into consideration the 1994 genocide that claimed more than 800,000 lives. "It's again contextual. You are dealing with a situation where people had seen the kind of journalism that encouraged the genocide," he said.

On the other hand, Ngoga said, the sensitivity of Rwanda's history made denial of the genocide a difficult issue to address. In recent months, presidential hopeful Victoire Ingabire and American lawyer Peter Erlinder were arrested on charges of genocide denial.

In response to criticism of the government's handling of these cases, Mushikiwabo said genocide denial comes in many forms, citing genocide minimization, rewriting of history and misinterpretation.

"Denial is [often] the last assault to the [memory of the] victims," said Ngoga. He said the genocide and its aftermath cannot be isolated when addressing cases of alleged genocide denial.

Mushikiwabo said the government's actions were aimed at guarding Rwandan society against a repeat of past events. Ngoga agreed, saying is the government was perhaps being judged harshly because it was alone in its fight. Unlike European nations that have a convergence of efforts of fighting denial through legislation and law, he said, Rwanda lacks such support.

"We're not doing anything unusual and the criticism is not justified," Ngoga said.

Human rights groups, civil society organizations and the international community, including the United States, have hit out at Rwanda over the recent events and atmosphere leading up to the August election.

Mushikiwabo said security remained a top priority of the Kagame government. "Security is one of the most important pillars that have allowed Rwanda to rebuild itself in the last 16 years," she said.

But questions have been raised in recent months about the country's level of stability. General Kayumba Nyamwasa, a former confidant of President Kagame turned bitter enemy, survived being shot in June in South Africa. In April, there were a series of grenade attacks in the capital, Kigali.

"[The country] remains, to a certain level, very fragile," said Mushikiwabo.

However, she said, although Rwanda was continuing its healing process, it is beginning to see different priorities and goals. "It's [also] a time of transition, where we feel now that 16 years after the genocide we are moving on."

The Atlantic Council event was moderated by Nancy Walker, director of the council's Michael S. Ansari Africa Center.

2. Peace keeping/ Conflict Resolution and Security matters

Congo-Kinshasa: ICC Puts Release of Warlord on Hold Pending Prosecution Appeal

UN news service

The appeals chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) today suspended the decision by the trials chamber to release war crimes suspect Thomas Lubanga Dyilo of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), pending the determination of the prosecution's appeal of the verdict.

Mr. Lubanga Dyilo will, therefore, remain under the custody of the ICC, the appeals chamber ruled.

The trials chamber had ordered Mr. Lubanga Dyilo's release on 15 July, after ruling that an accused cannot be held in preventative custody on a speculative basis, namely that at some stage in the future the proceedings may be resurrected. The prosecution filed an appeal against the oral decision and on 16 July submitted an urgent application for suspensive effect of the appeal.

The appeals chamber found that an immediate implementation of the order to release Mr. Lubanga Dyilo could render the resumption of the trial impossible, should the appeals chamber later rule in favour of the prosecutor's appeal against the decision to stop proceedings and the oral decision to release the accused.

"In these circumstances, his release could potentially defeat the purpose of these appeals. The Appeals Chamber therefore suspended the implementation of the release of Mr. Lubanga Dyilo pending the determination of this appeal," the ICC said in a press release.

Mr. Lubanga Dyilo stands accused of having committed, as co-perpetrator, war crimes of enlisting and conscripting of children under the age of 15 into the Patriotic Forces for the Liberation of Congo, and using them to participate actively in hostilities in Ituri district in eastern DRC between September 2002 and August 2003.

The case was referred to the ICC by the DRC Government in April 2004. Other suspects standing trial in the ICC for alleged offences committed within the context of the DRC conflict are Germain Katanga and Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui. Bosco Ntaganda has been indicted but remains at large. ICC investigations in the DRC are ongoing.

Congo-Kinshasa: Secretary Clinton on Conflict Minerals in DR-Congo

America.gov (Washington, DC)

Last year in the Democratic Republic of Congo, I spoke out against the trade in "conflict minerals" that has funded a cycle of conflict there that has left more than 5 million people dead since 1998, displaced countless more, and spawned an epidemic of sexual and gender-based violence.

President Obama has now signed into law a measure that will require corporations to publicly disclose what they are doing to ensure that their products don't contain these minerals. The DRC has formally expressed its support for this law and has thanked both the executive and legislative branches of our government. This is one of several steps we are taking to stop this illicit and deadly trade.

After my visit to the Congo, I directed the State Department to develop a holistic strategy on this issue as part of our broader effort to engage effectively with the DRC. We continue to work with the government to crack down on corruption, both bilaterally and

through the Great Lakes Contact Group. At the United Nations Security Council, we successfully pushed to expand the listing criteria in the DRC Sanctions Committee to include those supporting illegal armed groups through illicit trade of natural resources.

We have provided support for initiatives on certification and due diligence that have been initiated by the government of the DRC, local and foreign industry groups, and regional and international institutions. And we have met with a wide range of industry representatives and discussed the responsibility of end-users to ensure their supply chains are free of conflict minerals.

All of these steps underscore the commitment of the United States to stand with the people of Congo and to work toward an end to this conflict.

Rebels Attack Army Base in Central African Republic

VOA News

Rebels in the Central African Republic on Monday attacked an army base near the country's border with Sudan.

The army said it fought off the attack in the northeastern town of Birao and is now in control of the base.

No casualty toll from the battle was available. There are also conflicting reports about which rebel group led the attack.

Several rebel movements have signed a peace agreement with the government of President Francois Bozize.

The CAR has been plagued with coups and military revolts since winning independence from France in 1960.

In more recent years, the government has also struggled to subdue rebel groups and control the spillover of violence from Sudan's Darfur region.

The United Nations has peacekeeping troops in the CAR and neighboring Chad to provide security for internally displaced people in those two nations as well as to help refugees from Darfur.

The Central African Republic is expected to hold presidential elections later this year. President Bozize has been in power since ousting former President Ange-Felix Patasse in a 2003 military coup.

3. Elections

Burundi Votes in Opposition-Boycotted Election

VOA

Voters in Burundi are casting ballots in a parliamentary election the ruling party is almost certain to win, amid a boycott by an opposition coalition.

The opposition also boycotted last month's presidential election. Unopposed, President Pierre Nkurunziza was re-elected.

The opposition decided to boycott both votes after accusing the president of using fraud to win local elections in May. International observers said there was no evidence of tampering.

Security has also been a concern during this election season. Burundi has been on alert since Somali insurgents threatened to attack the country for its role in the peacekeeping mission in Somalia.

Somali Islamist rebel group al-Shabab claimed responsibility for bombings in Uganda earlier this month that killed 76 people. It said the attacks were revenge for Ugandan participation in the peacekeeping force.

Burundi Parliamentary Vote Begins Friday

VOA

A leading member of Burundi's opposition Forces for National Liberation (FNL) has called on supporters of his party as well as other opposition parties to boycott the parliamentary election scheduled to begin Friday.

Jean-Bosco Habyarimana, spokesman for the FNL accused both President Pierre Nkurunziza's government and the Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) of undermining the credibility of the parliamentary vote.

"It was known that we will not participate in this election. You remember we rejected the results of the (local) election because of the fraud that characterized those elections. We requested for a dialogue in which we could maybe correct the problems and then try to get a solution but the government refused," he said.

Burundi's opposition groups rejected the results of the May 24 local elections, saying it was fraught with irregularities and voter intimidation. They demanded a re-run of the vote. But, the electoral commission refused, saying the election was transparent and credible.

Pierre Claver Ndayicariye, chairman of the electoral body said the parliamentary vote will continue as planned despite the opposition boycott.

But, opposition leader Habyarimana said his party will not participate in an election in which the ruling National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) is pre-determined to win.

“The one who refused us is the one who refused the dialogue so that we can correct the faults that characterized the community elections. He is the one who [prevented] us from continuing in the electoral process,” Habyarimana said.

He also described Friday’s vote as illegal. “All what is being done is against the law,” he said. Habyarimana said despite the boycott his party will continue to offer stiff opposition to President Pierre Nkurunziza’s government.

Report Finds Endemic Corruption in Burundi, Uganda and Kenya

The New Times

Kenyan institutions are still among the most corrupt in East Africa, but the country is no longer in top place among five countries surveyed by Transparency International, a group that monitors corruption around the world.

The Transparency International survey says the Kenyan Police are the second most corrupt institution in east Africa, falling just behind the police forces of Burundi, the most corrupt country in East Africa, according to the East African Bribery Index 2010. The annual survey developed by Berlin-based Transparency International measures bribery levels in the private and public sectors in the region.

The latest ranking, released Thursday in Nairobi, shows Kenya has registered a slight improvement in the prevalence of corruption overall, dropping from first to third place behind Burundi and Uganda.

Nevertheless, the survey lists Kenya's Ministry of Defense, the Nairobi City Council and the country's judiciary among the top 10 most corrupt institutions in the region.

The study praised Kenya for enacting legislation, such as the Anti-Corruption and Economic Crimes Act and the Public Officers' Ethics Act, to fight corruption, but found that the country had made relatively little progress in eliminating bribery from daily life.

Kenya has a long history of corruption in the public sector. In the early 1990s, many prominent politicians, including then President Daniel Moi, were implicated in the Goldenberg Scandal, in which the Kenyan government paid over \$600 million for non-existent gold and diamond exports.

In 2009, stores of maize from the country's strategic grain reserve were sold to local millers in order to combat rising prices and low supply. Much of the grain, meant for Kenyan markets, was then sold outside the country to avoid local price controls.

The East African Bribery Index found that in Burundi and Uganda, citizens pay bribes in around one-third of their public sector interactions.

The deputy executive director of Transparency International-Kenya, Lisa Karanja, told reporters that corruption could do real damage to the newly integrating East African Community.

"Exactly three weeks ago, the protocol came into effect amidst excitement and high expectations among the citizens of the East African Community," says Karanja. "Corruption threatens to hold back the attainment of the objectives set out by member states. The release of the bribery index is not an occasion for empty activism, but an opportunity to identify loopholes in public institutions that provide fertile ground for corruption and other malpractices."

The Common Market Protocol of the East African Community, which took effect on July 1st, allows citizens of the East Africa Community to live, work and travel freely within the region. The Community hopes to tap into combined economic potential of member states Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Though the East African bribery index paints a negative picture of the prospects for a smooth integration, not all of the countries scored poorly.

The report found bribery and corruption in Rwanda to be extremely low. Only 1.7 percent of more than 4,000 respondents were faced with bribery, and less than one percent actually paid, a figure which the report called "negligible."

According to Transparency International-Kenya, a comparative study of Rwanda's public sector could provide a detailed path to the elimination of corruption in the region.

Rwanda: Kagame's Rally Attracts Record Crowd in Burera

The New Times

Burera — RPF's candidate, Paul Kagame, yesterday, continued his campaign in the Northern Province, addressing tens of thousands of party supporters who had turned up for the campaign rallies in the districts of Burera and Musanze.

In Burera, the crowd was massive, evidently larger than the ones in Rulindo and Gakenke districts. It is estimated that over 130, 000 residents gathered to give Kagame a heroic welcome to the district.

The crowds danced vigorously and sang RPF songs on top of their voices. Local artists, Tom Close, Dr. Claude, King James and Tuyisenge of the "Tora Kagame" fame, helped fire up the excited crowd.

President Kagame arrived at the venue - the Peace and Leadership centre, Nkumba, in Burera district - at 1 p.m., to a deafening welcome by the already buoyant crowd singing RPF songs and proceeded to greet supporters.

Kagame, who started his upcountry campaign in the North, was promised by the residents of Burera district a payback of 100%, come August 9, for his role in turning around the district from the most remote to one of the most enterprising in the country.

The candidate told the residents of Burera that he was not just there to ask for their votes but to consult and share ideas, on how to sustain the development in the district.

He said that Burera is a beautiful district with good climate and lakes, telling residents that as the government worked with them to reclaim the lakes, it will continue to work with them for further progress.

Burera district is home to L. Burera and L. Ruhondo which were on the verge of drying up due to human activities but the residents and the government embarked on programmes to restore the two lakes.

Kagame, pointed out that the people of Burera have worked hard to restore peace in the country and the prevailing stability is responsible for the achievement the country has recorded, which Burera has contributed to.

He commended the residents of Burera for responding positively to government programmes of agriculture, health, education, peace and democracy, adding that impressive progress has been made but that there is need to do more.

The RPF candidate told the cheering audience that more can be achieved if they make the right choice in the forthcoming presidential elections, and that RPF and its candidate have what it takes to guide them on that path.

He went on to emphasize that the choice they make during the August 9, polls will determine whether the country will continue to move forward in terms of development, improving the standards of living for all Rwandans and pursuing good relations with neighbours.

Kagame said that as a candidate chosen by the RPF and the people of Burera, he will not disappoint, and will continue to deliver in education, health, infrastructure and pursuing policies that develop the country.

Some of the residents especially women and youth gave testimonies on how they have been able to uplift themselves, through government poverty alleviation programs, among them, the one-cow-per-family programme, health insurance and education for all.

"We have come here to show the solidarity and our sincere support for Paul Kagame who has accorded us respect, brought change to our livelihoods, and to pledge our full support in the presidential elections," Virginia Mujawayezu said.

Kagame proceeded to ISAE Busogo where he addressed a huge rally where tens of thousands of residents of Musanze and Nyabihu districts had turned up.

Shortly after he was introduced by the campaign manager, Fidele Ndayisaba, Kagame told the massive crowd that the country had achieved a lot in the past, and no one should claim, including those who come from abroad, that they can do a better job than the RPF.

Kagame continues on the campaign trail, today, in the districts of Nyabihu and Rubavu in the Western Province.

Rwanda: Opposition Asks Obama, Cameron for Help with 'Political Crisis'

Radio France Internationale (Paris)

The president of a Rwandan opposition party has written an open letter to US President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron urging them to intervene in what he calls a political crisis in Rwanda.

John Karuranga, president of the Rwandan People's Party, says Rwandan President Paul Kagame has gravely mismanaged the country, with the support of the US and the UK.

Karuranga told RFI from London that Kagame has been misrepresenting the most volatile issue in Rwanda today - genocide.

Campaigning Begins in Rwandan Election

VOA

Campaigning has begun in Rwanda for an election expected to return President Paul Kagame to power.

Political tensions are high in the country following a series of arrests and killings that targeted opposition figures and journalists.

Also, three main opposition parties say authorities did not allow them to register for the August 9 vote.

Victoire Ingabire, leader of the unregistered Unified Democratic Forces party says she is ready to organize a boycott of the elections.

Ingabire has faced legal action since April, after being accused of denying Rwanda's 1994 genocide.

Earlier this month, the vice president of the Rwandan Democratic Green Party, Andre Kagwa Rwisereka, was found dead, nearly decapitated. Also this month, the editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper Umuvugizi, Jean Leonard Rugambage, was shot and killed.

The government denies any involvement in the killings.

Critics have accused President Kagame of stifling opposition and freedom of expression ahead of the poll.

The French news agency, AFP, reports that Mr. Kagame told reporters in Kigali Tuesday that Rwandans have the freedom to decide who will lead them. He said he is confident Rwandans will choose to work with the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front but said he cannot take anything for granted.

The presidential election will be the second since the 1994 genocide, in which Hutu extremists killed an estimated 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

President Kagame and his party won the last election in 2003.

The official Rwanda News Agency says the candidates will have 20 days to campaign.

Opposition Leader Urges Rwandans to Boycott August Vote

VOA

The leader of Rwanda's unregistered opposition United Democratic Forces said she is ready to organize Rwandans to boycott the upcoming general election scheduled for August 9.

Victoire Ingabire says there is no need to waste money and resources to participate in an election that will not be credible.

"The real opposition party in Rwanda will not participate in the election. And, you know that there is always a permanent persecution for the opposition. And, we know that the regime of [President Paul] Kagame will arrange the election register, the rate of participation in the election, the management of the polling station[s] and the counting of votes, and will decide the results it wants," she said.

She also claimed that senior officials of the election commission are members of the ruling party.

Opposition groups have expressed concern that the National Electoral Commission will favor President Paul Kagame's ruling Patriotic Front Party in the upcoming vote, a charge the electoral body denies.

Ingabire said the government has often refused to address opposition concerns ahead of the vote.

"You know, the members of this commission are members of RPF. Why [should] we vote if we know who will win? The regime of [Mr.] Kagame will take all measures to expel the opposition in the process and they will push the population to vote for [Mr.] Kagame," Ingabire said.

International human right groups, as well as Rwanda's opposition parties, have expressed concern over the killings of opposition figures in the country, viewed by some as politically motivated.

The groups allege that the government is cracking down on dissenting views ahead of the August vote.

They said two independent newspapers have so far been banned from publishing, while opposition politicians and human rights organizations have been harassed by the authorities in the run up to the election.

But, supporters of the ruling party dismiss the allegations saying the government has launched investigations to find and punish the perpetrators behind the killings, as well as claims of intimidation and harassment.

Opposition leader Ingabire was recently prevented from traveling 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 deaths 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 denied the charges against her as a plot to prevent her from challenging incumbent President Kagame in the upcoming vote.

"Now, it [has] been more than five months that the government has no possibility to bring it to the court the charges against me. They said I am denying genocide and collaboration with a terrorist organization, but five months and...they cannot bring the case to trial. This is why, from the beginning, I said this process is only to prevent me from participating in the election because [Mr.] Kagame knows, if I contest with him, I will win," Ingabire said.

Observers expect incumbent President Kagame to decisively win the general election saying the opposition offers little or no challenge in the run up to the election.

4. Refuges / IDPs

Congo-Kinshasa: Top UN Officials Voice Hope That Refugees Can Return Home

UN News Service

The top United Nations food and refugee officials today expressed hope that security will soon improve to allow people uprooted by years of conflict in the volatile east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to return home and begin farming their land.

While increasing numbers of people are resuming their lives in the area, António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said that "it's a goal that can only be achieved if protection of civilians in DRC is both a national and international priority."

For her part, Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), said that she has no doubts that "given the support they need, and the stability that they crave, the people of this region can take advantage of the fertile land they live on to build a better future."

The two officials are currently in North Kivu province, which, along with neighbouring South Kivu, have been ravaged by fighting between Government troops and rebel groups.

In the past 15 months, relative stability has returned to some areas, allowing more than 1 million people to return home, but many have also been displaced recently due to new outbreaks of violence.

Last week, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that clashes between DRC troops and remnants of a Ugandan insurgency forced an estimated 20,000 people to flee their villages in North Kivu province.

Ms. Sheeran said that WFP is planning to help communities that are relatively peaceful return to productive lives through schemes involving cash, vouchers and the purchase of local goods to support the agricultural economy.

The two officials were scheduled to visit camps near Nyanzale, more than 100 kilometres from North Kivu's provincial capital, Goma, housing internally displaced persons (IDPs).

WFP is providing food assistance to some 150,000 uprooted people in North Kivu, including nearly 4,000 in three camps around Nyanzale. The vast majority of the inhabitants of the sites are women, most of whom have lost their husbands and many of whom have been raped during years of strife.

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) is coordinating humanitarian aid for 84,000 IDPs in 42 camps and is also working to prevent and respond to sexual violence. Since 2007, the agency has helped 106,000 people return to their villages and rebuild their lives.

Congo-Kinshasa: In Country, UN Official Pledges Support to Help Displaced People Return Home

UN news service

The United Nations refugee chief is visiting the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where he has pledged assistance and support for civilians uprooted by fighting to return to their homes and rebuild their lives.

"The need is to prepare conditions for people to return to their homes," António Guterres, High Commissioner for Refugees, said during a stop in Dongo in the western province of Equateur on Wednesday.

Ethnic clashes in Equateur earlier this year caused the displacement of tens of thousands of people, as well as widespread damage to homes and infrastructure.

The UN refugee agency, known as UNHCR, was forced to suspend its operations in the area in the wake of the violence, during which its offices were also destroyed.

Mr. Guterres, who met with former internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Dongo, said his agency is getting ready to re-establish a presence in the region to help the internally displaced as well as prepare for the return of refugees.

There are 115,000 refugees currently living in neighbouring Republic of Congo, most of whom are originally from Dongo and Equateur's provincial capital of Mbandaka.

While emphasizing the importance of humanitarian assistance for those in the region, the High Commissioner also highlighted the need to tackle other issues vital for development.

"The root causes of the conflict must be addressed, and development programmes that ease economic and social integration must be implemented. The response of the international community has to be proportionate with the dimensions of and the nature of the problems," he stated.

According to UNHCR, fighting between militia groups and the Congolese armed forces, as well as violence against civilians, has displaced some 1.85 million people within the country and created 450,000 refugees - most hosted in neighbouring countries.

Last year alone, close to 210,000 were displaced from Equateur province - both internally, and across to neighboring countries, while over a million other people were displaced in eastern DRC.

Mr. Guterres will travel to North Kivu province in the country's east tomorrow accompanied by Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), who is currently on a fact-finding visit to Niger, DRC, Uganda and Rwanda.

Ahead of their visit to North Kivu, both officials were scheduled to meet today with President Joseph Kabila and senior members of the DRC Government.

They will both travel to the Ugandan capital, Kampala, this weekend for the opening of the African Union summit on 25 July.

Also attending the AU summit - which this year focuses on maternal, infant and child health and development in Africa - is Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro. Representing Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, she will address the gathering on issues of concern such as Somalia and Sudan, as well as hold bilateral discussions with a number of heads of State who will be at the summit.

5. Pan Africa

Rwanda: UN to Release Global Crisis Report Today

The New Times

Kigali — The World Bank and the United Nations (UN) will today release a report showing how the global financial crisis has impacted on economies in the world.

The revelation was made yesterday by Patrick Bitature the Chairman of the Uganda Investment Authority during a press briefing at the ongoing African Union (AU) summit in Kampala.

"The World Bank and the United Nations have done a study and the official date for the release of the study is tomorrow (today)," he said without divulging details of the findings.

He added that due to a contraction of money and credit globally, this led to the crisis having severe impact on all countries of the world.

Experts have said that Rwanda was shielded from the crisis for several reasons, including the fact that it is geographically far away from the source of the problem (the developed world).

Bitature called for concerted efforts on the part of the private and public sectors in transforming Africa into a strong economic hub that will favorably compete with the western world.

"We have to deliberately work on all these bottlenecks like ensuring free movement of goods and services in all our countries," he said.

Rwanda: AU Hails Nation for Empowering Women

The New Times

Kigali — The African Union (AU) has recognized efforts by the Rwandan government to empower women by giving them access to decision-making positions in the country's political landscape.

In an exclusive interview with The New Times, the Director of Women, Gender and Development Directorate at the AU, Litha Musyimi-Igana, said that some African countries have ignored women's services which have slowed the developing processes on the continent.

"Rwanda is the leading country in Africa which has discovered the role and significance of women as far as development in Africa is concerned. If you see their participation, especially domination of women in parliament, it makes us proud as women since we were anciently taken as inferiors," she said.

Musyimi-Igana urged Rwandan women to lay strategies and mechanisms consolidating themselves in important positions as well as sustaining the achievements they have realized in Rwanda and African as a continent.

"They must fight as women to strengthen their ability and lay mechanisms to make sure they sustain the good achievement they have made".

She called upon all African women to take the lead from their Rwandan counterparts if they are to make the set goals like the MGDs in their respective countries a reality.

"African women will remain lagging behind if they don't come out to fight for their rights through indulging in their self development and their countries," she said adding that in achieving this, Rwandan women have to be taken as role models.

Meanwhile in the same interview, Litha also thanked the incredible work that First lady Jeannette Kagame has done in fighting malaria, AIDS and the well being of women and children in Rwanda.

"I really appreciate and commend the outstanding performance that Madam Jeannette Kagame has dedicated to women and child health in her country; this justifies her commitment of developing women in Africa and world at large."

