

Report # 132
BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
Central Africa
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Weekly Report from August 8 to 14 August 2010
Presentation: 18 August 2010

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Summary

1. Peace keeping/ Conflict Resolution and Security matters

Congo-Kinshasa: International Justice Denied?

It had been a hectic few days for the rebel commander-turned-army general, who had also attended meetings with the provincial governor and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) President Joseph Kabila. Bosco Ntaganda is a wanted man, under indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes in the northeastern Ituri region where Hague prosecutors allege he played a senior role in the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), a militia group accused of human rights abuses, including ethnic massacres, torture and rape. But four years after the ICC first issued the warrant; Ntaganda still lives openly in Goma. He has made peace with the government and serves in the army. His continued freedom is bad news for a court struggling with recent judicial setbacks and an increasingly skeptical DRC public.

Rwanda: Cabinet Reviews Genocide Ideology Law

As Rwanda's president Paul Kagame heads for election victory, the government is reviewing its genocide ideology law. Rights groups have accused it of limiting freedom of speech but, Justice Minister Tharcisse Karugarama, insists that the changes are the cabinet's own idea. Kagame, who is certain to secure a second seven-year mandate when full provisional results are released, has been criticized for gagging the opposition through the use of Rwanda's Law Relating to the punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology. Ahead of Monday's election, two of Kagame's opponents were disqualified after being charged with genocide ideology, which is essentially ethnic hate speech.

2. Elections & the process of democratization

Rwanda: This is My Last Term in Power - Kagame

President Paul Kagame has said he does not intend to change the country's constitution to extend his last presidential term beyond 2017. Mr. Kagame said, "Personally I don't want to be involved or in changing the constitution so that I stay in power and particularly changing the constitution for that purpose. I would really hate it." Mr. Kagame is yet to be sworn in as the new president of Rwanda for a constitutionally provided second and last seven-year term.

Rwanda: Kagame's Three Rivals Accept Poll Defeat

Rwanda's official opposition parties that participated in the Monday's poll, were required by law to challenge the out come of the tally within 48 hours, but just hours after the official results were announced on Wednesday they all accepted defeat. The three rival

candidates representing different political parties have been accused by critics and human rights organizations of having close links to President Paul Kagame's ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and thus offering no credible opposition. The unofficial and unregistered opposition headed by Victoire Ingabire who is on charges of funding rebels in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo and espousing genocide ideology, rejected the result saying the three conceding candidates were a democratic smokescreen and stooges of Kagame's RPF. On Wednesday a top National Electoral Commission (NEC) official, Charles Munyaneza, announced that Mr. Kagame had won with 93.08 percent of the total votes cast. NEC said that of the 5.1 million registered voters, 5.04 million were cast representing a 97.51 percent turnout.

Rwandan Officials Promise Free, Fair and Transparent Election Monday

Rwandans are voting Monday in a presidential election that opponents of President Paul Kagame denounced as a sham. President Kagame faces three other candidates believed to have ties to his ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front.

Rwanda: Presidential Elections Fair - NCHR

The Rwanda National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) has said that the rights of candidates in the recently concluded presidential elections and their supporters were properly observed. In a press statement released by the commission's president, Sylvie Zainabu Kayitesi, the candidates campaigned with mutual respect and that there was no mudslinging.

Rwanda: Civil Society Commends Presidential Poll

The Civil Society Election Observation Mission (CSEOM) has announced that Monday's presidential election was conducted in a transparent and conducive atmosphere. This was revealed by the chief observer and spokesperson of the Rwanda Civil Society Platform, Eugene Rwibasira, during a press conference. Rwibasira paid tribute to the National Electoral Commission (NEC), which he said, demonstrated a high level of organization and timekeeping throughout the election season, and putting in place numerous polling stations which enhanced accessibility. He also applauded all the four presidential candidates for building their platforms around issues of national interest, rather than divisive messages as some have done in the past. He described this as an indication of maturity on the part of political parties operating in the country.

Rwandans Vote in Controversial Presidential Poll

Accusations of political repression have surrounded Rwanda's presidential election, but the country was quiet as early voters cast their ballots. Long lines had formed outside polling stations before dawn, but voting has proceeded largely without incident. Rwandans will choose one of four candidates to lead the small central African nation for Mr. Kagame has effectively ruled the country since taking power with the Rwandan Patriotic Front after the 1994 genocide. He is credited with quickly rebuilding the

country, fighting corruption and attracting international investment. International organizations, such as Reporters without Borders and Human Rights Watch, have accused Mr. Kagame of silencing opposition and suppressing independent media. Some observers say the repression of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front has made democratic elections impossible.

Rwandan Election Chief Says Kagame Set to Seal Re-Election

Rwandan election officials say early results indicate President Paul Kagame is headed for a landslide re-election victory. The head of the election commission Chrysologu Karangwa said Mr. Kagame could tally more than 90 percent of the votes. However, rights groups say his government has instituted a climate of repression.

Rwanda: Grenade Attack Injures Seven After Kagame Declared Winner

A grenade attack on the streets of Kigali, the capital of Rwanda on Wednesday night injured at least seven, according to police, just hours after President Paul Kagame was declared winner of the top job in the country. Witness saw two children wounded and one woman who lost an eye, adding that the number of injured was at least 20.

Questions Remain as Kagame Returns to Power in Rwanda

Rwandan President Paul Kagame has been returned to power with an overwhelming victory in presidential elections. The leader has another seven years to build upon his impressive programs of social and economic development. The recent campaign, however, leaves lingering doubts about the president's democratic credentials.

Rwanda's Kagame Wins 93 Percent of Vote in Re-election Bid

Rwanda's electoral commission says President Paul Kagame has won 93 percent of the vote in Monday's election to secure a second term. On Tuesday, Mr. Kagame danced on stage and thanked thousands of supporters in Kigali's main football stadium, after preliminary results gave him an overwhelming lead.

3. Africa-U.S Relations

DRC Welcomes US Support to Defeat LRA Rebels

A Cabinet minister in the Democratic Republic of Congo says his administration will cooperate with U.S. President Barack Obama's administration as Washington develops a comprehensive strategy to deal with the Lord's Resistance Army rebels (LRA). Information minister Lambert Mende said the government needs intelligence support in its effort to defeat the LRA rebels, who are accused of killing, mutilating and abducting unarmed Congolese in the northeastern part of the country.

4. Health

Burundi: HIV-Positive People Struggling for Treatment of Opportunistic Infections

Thousands of Burundians living with HIV are failing to obtain drugs to treat opportunistic infections since a system to provide them with free medical care has come to an end. The National AIDS Control Council (CNLS) has, for the past two years, provided free medical care to an estimated 22,000 members of the Burundi Network for People living with HIV (RBP+). Under the system, members are issued with cards entitling them to free treatment, which is then billed to RBP+. However, following the end of the agreement in April 2010, access to these essential drugs has been difficult.

Conflict Fuels High Death Rate, Health Problems in Central African Republic Decades of fighting, plus poverty, create public health disaster, study finds Art

The Central African Republic has been plagued by poverty and violence for decades. A random household survey examines how the situation has affected residents' physical and mental health. JAMA, the journal of the American Medical Association, features several research papers focusing on violence as a public health issue. One looks at how conflict in the Central African Republic has resulted in increased illness, mental health issues, and death rates. Researchers adapted smart phones to help record responses, the first time such technology was used to conduct surveys in the Central African Republic. If conflict and violence in the Central African Republic sounds like a story about power and politics, it is. But it doesn't mean it isn't also a public health issue.

5. Militancy, Rebels, Terrorism and the War on terror

Central African Republic: LRA Conducts Massive Abduction Campaign

The Ugandan rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has abducted more than 697 adults and children in a largely unreported campaign in the Central African Republic and the neighboring Bas Uele district of northern Democratic Republic of Congo over the past 18 months, Human Rights Watch said today. Nearly one-third of those abducted have been children, many of whom are being forced to serve as soldiers or are being used for sex by the group's fighters. Human Rights Watch called on the affected governments and their allies to strengthen their protection of civilians and to put greater emphasis on efforts to rescue the abducted children and others.

6. Economy and Energy

Rwanda: Local Mining Firms to Get International Certification

Rwandan mining companies that comply with internationally accepted standards are to be graded and issued with a certificate of compliance by the end of this year in an effort to improve the performance of the sector. This follows the launch of a pilot project on mineral certification by the Rwanda Geology and Mines Authority (OGMIR) with the support of the Germany Institute of Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR) that began in August last year. Mining is one of the top sources of government revenue.

Details

1. Peace keeping/ Conflict Resolution and Security matters

Congo-Kinshasa: International Justice Denied?

IRIN

Analysis

Goma — On a typically busy morning in North Kivu's capital city Goma, nobody at the bank paid much attention to Bosco Ntaganda and his bodyguards. It had been a hectic few days for the rebel commander-turned-army general, who had also attended meetings with the provincial governor and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) President Joseph Kabila.

Nothing unusual in that, except Ntaganda is a wanted man, under indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes in the northeastern Ituri region where Hague prosecutors allege he played a senior role in the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), a militia group accused of human rights abuses, including ethnic massacres, torture and rape.

But four years after the ICC first issued the warrant; Ntaganda still lives openly in Goma. He has made peace with the government and serves in the army. His continued freedom is bad news for a court struggling with recent judicial setbacks and an increasingly skeptical DRC public.

"Bosco is a key challenge for the ICC in terms of credibility and how it is perceived," said Geraldine Mattioli Zeltner, advocacy director of the international justice programme at Human Rights Watch (HRW). "Implementing that arrest warrant is a key aspect of that credibility."

The court has been knocked by developments in The Hague where the former UPC leader, Thomas Lubanga, sits in a cell in the seaside resort of Scheveningen contemplating his improving prospects for freedom.

After more than four years in custody and 18 months into his trial - the ICC's first - for recruiting child soldiers in Ituri, judges last month stopped the case for the second time and ordered his release.

In a ruling on 8 July, they said a fair trial was impossible and criticized ICC prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo for his "unequivocal refusal" to obey court orders and disclose the identity of an intermediary working with investigators. The judges ruled that Moreno-Ocampo had claimed a "separate authority which can defeat the orders of the court ... a profound, unacceptable and unjustified intrusion into the role of the judiciary."

Intermediaries helped prosecutors with their investigations on the ground in DRC, identifying leads and possible witnesses. Lubanga's defence has alleged that some have paid off prosecution witnesses and coached them to lie.

Prosecutors deny defying the judges. They insist that staying the trial was a judicial overreaction and say they cannot endanger the intermediary by disclosing his identity before proper protective measures are put in place.

"[The office of the prosecutor] will show that the decision to stay proceedings in this case was excessive and disproportionate," reads the appeal. "The chamber had at its disposal a range of alternative adequate remedies short of discontinuation of trial proceedings, a measure that not only impacts on the rights of the prosecution but also on those of victims and of the communities where the crimes have taken place."

An ICC spokesperson refused to comment further. Lubanga will remain in ICC custody pending the outcome of the appeal.

Consequences

The trial was also stayed in 2008 when prosecutors failed to disclose key evidence to the defence team. More delays, coupled with the possible release of Lubanga, are prompting criticism. Georges Kapiamba, a lawyer and member of the Congolese Coalition for the ICC, urged Moreno-Ocampo to reconsider his refusal to comply with the judge's orders.

"He should think about the consequences of maintaining his current position on the credibility of the court," said Kapiamba. "Congolese people are interpreting [the staying of the trial] as willingness by the ICC to make things unnecessarily long."

While pointing out that delays are to be expected with the court's first trial and that the judicial process can be lengthy, international analysts are also concerned about the effects the high-profile problems are having on the court's reputation.

"Ultimately if we keep having delays ... it makes it very difficult to promote the ICC," said Lorraine Smith, the ICC programme manager at the International Bar Association. "It casts a shadow on people's perception of the [court]."

There are also fears of misunderstandings. "The problem remains that this will be a basis for Lubanga's supporters to claim that he is innocent," said HRW's Mattioli.

Outreach needed

The survivors of the ethnic violence in Ituri, particularly those who have cooperated with the ICC and now fear retribution, are among the most affected by the recent developments.

Carla Ferstman, director of Redress, a human rights group working with survivors of war crimes in DRC, is concerned that ICC outreach teams are not doing more to explain the situation.

"The court has been very quiet ... perhaps this is because of the ongoing appeals process, but it is a shame there is so little coming from the court as it is important for them to address the misinformation and manage expectations," said Ferstman.

"If you think about it positively, the decision is a very strong sign of the independence of the court, that the court is prepared to take a decision that is procedurally right, but this will not make much difference to victims in DRC where the decision is likely to confirm their worst feelings about a court that is not able to address their concerns."

It has been a turbulent few years for the ICC, the world's first permanent war crimes court, which came into being in 2002. With no police force of its own it relies on ICC member states to make arrests. Seven suspects from Uganda and Sudan remain at large, and in November 2009 judges refused to confirm the charges against Darfur rebel leader Abu Garda, at the time the only ICC indictee to surrender himself voluntarily.

Meanwhile, the trial of DRC's former vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba for crimes in the Central African Republic has been postponed from July pending a defence motion to suspend proceedings.

Pressure on "Terminator"

The arrest of Ntaganda - known as the Terminator from his time in Ituri - would give the ICC a welcome public relations boost in its fight against impunity. However, the government has refused to make the arrest, saying Ntaganda is too important to the ongoing peace process in the Kivu provinces.

After leaving the UPC, Ntaganda went to Goma where he joined the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), led by Laurent Nkunda. He eventually forced Nkunda out and in early 2009 signed a peace deal with the government. Human rights groups accuse Ntaganda of atrocities in North Kivu, including masterminding the 2008 attack on the town of Kiwanja.

A senior CNDP official told IRIN that Ntaganda was willing to go to The Hague - but not yet. "He doesn't fear the ICC at all," said Desire Kamanzi. "But he has a lot of work to do for his people and the community at large. He's not ready to surrender himself because of pressure from international activists."

Activists like Kapiamba, however, insist Ntaganda belongs in a courtroom, not the national army. "His presence within the army is menacing victims and witnesses and contributing to worsening tension in the region," he said.

Rwanda: Cabinet Reviews Genocide Ideology Law

Radio France Internationale (Paris)

As Rwanda's president Paul Kagame heads for election victory, the government is reviewing its genocide ideology law.

Rights groups have accused it of limiting freedom of speech but, Justice Minister Tharcisse Karugarama, insists that the changes are the cabinet's own idea.

Kagame, who is certain to secure a second seven-year mandate when full provisional results are released late Wednesday, has been criticized for gagging the opposition through the use of Rwanda's Law Relating to the punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology.

Ahead of Monday's election, two of Kagame's opponents were disqualified after being charged with genocide ideology, which is essentially ethnic hate speech.

Rwandan Justice Minister Tharcisse Karugarama told RFI that the cabinet has been working to change the genocide ideology law, which rights groups say is very loosely written.

But he denies that international pressure had prompted the move.

"Our internal assessment showed there was a problem somewhere ... so we decided as a country that we would review it," Karugarama says.

"But then external forces, who like to think they own sometimes the initiative, took advantage of our own internal debates and started mounting pressure. We are trying to amend this law, but we must investigate and see where the fault is."

Karugarama said he had commissioned two independent groups to look at the law. One is an academic institution in north America, the other a group in Europe.

"I don't want to give the names now, but when the law is being debated in the cabinet, we shall disclose the sources," Karugarama says.

"I have asked Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International to tell us what they think."

Karugarama denies the amended law will be more restrictive. It will be "so clear that there is nothing you can be mistaken about", he insists.

"We think it will address the issues that we have seen as weaknesses within the law itself ... but whatever you do there will be someone who is not satisfied," he says.

2. Elections & the process of democratization

Rwanda: This is My Last Term in Power - Kagame

The Monitor

Kigali — President Paul Kagame has said he does not intend to change the country's constitution to extend his last presidential term beyond 2017.

Speaking on Contact FM, a local radio based in Kigali on a show hosted by Ugandan journalist Andrew Mwenda, Mr Kagame said, "Personally I don't want to be involved or in changing the constitution so that I stay in power and particularly changing the constitution for that purpose. I would really hate it."

He added: "I don't know why it (change term-limits in a constitution) has been made an African thing. I have seen Europeans attempt to change their constitutions. I saw it in France when (Jacques) Chirac was about to run for a third term. I don't know why in other places it is not of interest and it has become an African thing. I don't intend to change the constitution."

Mr Kagame, who the country's electoral body officially announced the winner of Monday's presidential election, said he could have easily been president in 1994 slightly after the genocide but declined the office which Pasteur Bizimungu occupied until March 23, 2000.

"I refused to be the president. And somebody was president for six years. Now people are already talking about it (succession). The same reasons I should have stayed in power (after 2017) are the same reasons I shouldn't. If you have had a Kagame around for this long and he has failed to identify one who has a capacity to take over, I would take that as a failure on my part," he added.

Mr Kagame is yet to be sworn in as the new president of Rwanda for a constitutionally provided second and last seven-year term.

Landslide win

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) yesterday announced official results of the Monday presidential elections of which Mr Kagame's ruling Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) won with an overwhelming 93 per cent of the vote.

Observers from both the East African Community (EAC) and the Commonwealth said on Tuesday that the presidential elections were democratic and peaceful.

While the EAC observers said Rwanda's poll, the second in post-genocide era was in conformity with international standards, the Commonwealth Observers Group said the process was well organised and peaceful.

Despite the observers' submission, opponents said the three official opposition candidates were a democratic smokescreen and stooges of Kagame's RPF something the president dismissed as baseless.

Uneven play field

They also said the campaign playing field had been uneven, with three would-be opposition candidates including the controversial Victoire Ingabire being prevented from registering to contest the ballot.

While responding to question from listeners of Contact FM radio Mr Kagame said, "The 93 per cent has a lot to do with the context and what has happened in our country. Sixteen years ago, no institutions were functional and human life was at stake."

He added: "As we built the country people identify themselves with those institutions or people who have impacted on their lives that is how the RPF and Kagame has gained a confidence of people."

On concerns raised by international human rights groups about a "hostile" run-up to the elections, including detention of opponents and murder of a journalist, Mr Kagame said, "It is being taken for granted that the world should be divided like that. That poor Rwanda should just keep quite and they tell us what we should do."

The President added: "Some of these countries were some of these international journalists operate from are responsible for some of these miseries including the 1994 genocide. Some of us Africans are determined to fight for our dignity."

Rwanda: Kagame's Three Rivals Accept Poll Defeat

Daily Nation on the Web

Nairobi — Rwanda's official opposition parties that participated in the Monday's poll, were required - by law - to contest the out come of the tally within 48 hours, but just hours after the official results were announced on Wednesday they all conceded defeat.

The three rival candidates representing different political parties have been accused by critics and human rights organizations of having close links to President Paul Kagame's ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and thus offering no credible opposition.

However, by Wednesday evening all the three including Jean Damascene Ntawukuliryayo's Social Democratic Party (PSD), Prosper Higiro's Liberal Party (LP) and Alvera Mukabaramba of the Party for Peace and Concord) accepted defeat.

This means that the country's electoral body would go ahead and gazette President Paul Kagame 93 percent landslide victory as official and declare him as president for a second and last term.

The unofficial and unregistered opposition headed by Victoire Ingabire who is on charges of funding rebels in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo and espousing genocide ideology, rejected the result saying the three conceding candidates were a democratic smokescreen and stooges of Kagame's RPF.

Ms Ingabire, talking to the international press this week, said the recently concluded campaign playing field had been uneven, with her party and others including Frank Habineza's Green Party and another called Parti Social Imberakuri, were prevented from registering to contest the ballot.

The PPC candidate, Dr Mukabaramba the only woman in the race, whose party managed a miserable 0.4 percent of the votes cast, said on Wednesday that she had accepted Kagame's victory.

"Elections were peaceful and transparent, and I accept the outcome. The electorate voted for the candidate of their choice and I don't have any objection to that; I accept and respect the results that came from the election," she told the press.

Prosper Higiho who represented PL said, "I want to inform you that I accept the election results. This was the first time PL contested for the presidency. Though we did not achieve what we wanted, we learnt lessons in these elections which will help us in the future, he said. PSD's Dr Ntawukuriryayo a deputy speaker in the Lower Chamber of Parliament, who is was President Kagame's nearest rival winning at least 5.15 percent of the vote had earlier during the week said that as a democrat he was ready to accept the outcome of the elections.

"This is a very big achievement for my country and myself. This is what we have fought for all along and, as Rwandans, we have demonstrated democratic maturity," he added.

On Wednesday a top National Electoral Commission (NEC) official, Charles Munyaneza, announced that Mr. Kagame had won with 93.08 percent of the total votes cast. NEC said that of the 5.1 million registered voters, 5.04 million were cast representing a 97.51 percent turnout.

While the EAC observers said that Rwanda's poll, the second in post genocide era was in conformity with international standards, the Commonwealth Observers Group (COG) said in a provisional statement that was released Wednesday that the process was well organised and peaceful.

President Kagame won the last election in 2003, the first since the 1994 genocide, with 95 percent of the vote.

Rwandan Officials Promise Free, Fair and Transparent Election Monday

VOA

Rwandans are voting Monday in a presidential election that opponents of President Paul Kagame denounced as a sham.

President Kagame faces three other candidates believed to have ties to his ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front.

Charles Munyaneza, executive secretary of the Rwanda National Electoral Commission (NEC), said his commission is ready for Monday's vote.

"As I talk right now, it's only a few hours to elections. We are opening our polls at 6 A.M., and in terms of preparation, we have already delivered the election materials at all polling stations.

Munyaneza said the vote will be free, fair and transparent.

"We are sure that these elections are going to be free and fair because we have put in place everything. We have got the legal framework to make the election free and fair. We have recruited the right people to manage the election. In fact, this is not the first time we are going to do so. We have been on record of delivering (a) free and fair election," he said.

He denied allegations that some Rwandans might have been forced to attend President Kagame rallies.

"As far as the election campaigns are concerned, we did not get, as the electoral commission, any report to that effect. What we saw is that people are turning out for the campaigns for all the candidates," he said.

Human rights groups say real opponents to Mr. Kagame have been barred from fielding candidates.

Munyaneza denied that there was a deliberate attempt to exclude opposition candidate Victoire Ingabire, who has been under house arrest.

"I'm not aware whether she is an opposition candidate or if she ever wanted to be an opposition candidate. I know Ingabire and whatever has been happening. But, we are not concerned about whether she is under house arrest, or what. In the electoral commission, we are not concerned about that," Munyaneza said.

The Rwandan government has also been accused of being behind a series of attacks carried out in recent weeks against opponents of President Kagame.

Jean Leonard Rugambage, the acting editor of the deputy editor of the Umuvugizi newspaper was shot outside his home and died later at a hospital.

But, Justice Minister Karugarama said the allegations are being manufactured by “enemies of the state” and untrue.

“That is really most unfortunate that anybody would make such allegations. In the case of this journalist (Jean Leonard Rugambage), surely there is an investigation that is been carried out. There have been arrests, people have admitted an offense. The matter is before a court of law,” Karugarama said.

He also denied the government was behind the brutal murder of Andre Kagwa Rwisereka, vice president of the opposition Green Party.

“Why should anybody really want a deputy of the Green Party killed and killed by (the) government, especially at this point in time when Rwanda is the focus of all the news media in the world? Everybody (who) has ax to grind with Rwanda is out to find fault with Rwanda.”

General Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, a former ally of President Paul Kagame, who fled to South Africa, narrowly survived an attempted assassination in South Africa.

Karugarama also denied the Rwandan government was behind the attempt on General Nyamwasa’s life.

“I think the government spokesperson has talked a lot of about General Kayumba. The prosecutor-general of this country has talked a lot about it. The Rwandan minister of foreign affairs has explained there is an investigation going on in South Africa by a competent authority. Why don’t we give the South African police investigative machinery the chance to investigate and tell us what happened?” Karugarama said.

Rwanda: Presidential Elections Fair - NCHR

The New Times

Kigali — The Rwanda National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) has said that the rights of candidates in the recently concluded presidential elections and their supporters were properly observed.

In a press statement released by the commission's president, Sylvie Zainabu Kayitesi yesterday, the candidates campaigned with mutual respect and that there was no mudslinging.

"The rights of all candidates to equally use the national media was observed," a statement reads in part.

The commission followed up all the candidates' campaigns rallies in all parts of the country from July 20 to August 7.

It also oversaw campaign rallies by all parties and the election D-day preparations on August 8 where it observed that the secret voting booths were well built for the secret ballot and that hygiene, security and election materials arrived on time at the polling stations, according to a statement.

On election D-day, the commission also sent its observers in all 30 districts in the country who visited 286 polling stations across the country.

"The elections were calm, free and fair and conducted peacefully,. The Presidential elections were well organized both in preparations, campaigns and on the election D-day." the statement adds.

The commission commended the steps taken by Rwandans in the democratic process based on their right to vote for the candidate of their choice.

Rwanda: Civil Society Commends Presidential Poll

The New Times

Kigali — The Civil Society Election Observation Mission (CSEOM) has announced that Monday's presidential election was conducted in a transparent and conducive atmosphere.

This was revealed yesterday by the chief observer and spokesperson of the Rwanda Civil Society Platform, Eugene Rwibasira, during a press conference at Laico Umubano Hotel.

"According to the information from our teams, the election procedures were respected, both during the campaigns and on election day," he said.

Rwibasira paid tribute to the National Electoral Commission (NEC), which he said, demonstrated a high level of organization and timekeeping throughout the election season, and putting in place numerous polling stations which enhanced accessibility.

He also applauded all the four presidential candidates for building their platforms around issues of national interest, rather than divisive messages as some have done in the past. He described this as an indication of maturity on the part of political parties operating in the country.

The civil society official noted that the Election Day was characterized by calmness and order, and that the voter turnout was impressive.

Rwibasira pointed out that the voting procedures, counting; tallying and consolidation of results were simpler and clearer this time around, compared to the 2008 parliamentary elections.

He said the counting and consolidation of votes at polling centers, districts and national level was transparent and easy to monitor.

Some of the new practices were introduced by the new Electoral Code, which took into considerations some of the recommendations of observers of the previous elections.

He also indicated that the public media outlets offered equal space and airtime to all the four candidates, as provided for by the Electoral Code.

Security, Rwibasira said, was also assured during the campaigning period and on the polling day.

Rwandans Vote in Controversial Presidential Poll

Voting is underway in Rwanda's second presidential election since the 1994 genocide. Though four candidates are vying for the nation's highest office, many expect President Paul Kagame to be reelected by a wide margin.

Accusations of political repression have surrounded Rwanda's presidential election, but the country was quiet as early voters cast their ballots. Long lines had formed outside polling stations before dawn, but voting has proceeded largely without incident.

Rwandans will choose one of four candidates to lead the small central African nation for the next seven years. Nobody expects current President Paul Kagame, however, to receive much of a challenge. Mr. Kagame has effectively ruled the country since taking power with the Rwandan Patriotic Front after the 1994 genocide. He is credited with quickly rebuilding the country, fighting corruption and attracting international investment.

The former rebel leader enjoys broad support from the Rwandan people, but critics say that support is manufactured.

International organizations, such as Reporters without Borders and Human Rights Watch, have accused Mr. Kagame of silencing opposition and suppressing independent media. Some observers say the repression of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front has made democratic elections impossible.

Mr. Kagame, though, says such claims are unfair. Voting at a school in Kigali, the Rwandan leader expressed confidence that Rwandan voters would be heard.

"If the election is to be democratic we have to look at a number of things," said Kagame. "First of all, what the people of Rwanda think about it, in terms of their being free to

choose and to express themselves. So when I see the turnout - the turnout has been huge in the last three weeks - when I have seen how they have expressed themselves, all that has been done and said by the people of Rwanda give an impression, to me, that the process has been very democratic. I am just waiting for another moment to see the results."

Mr. Kagame promised to consolidate the gains of his first term, if elected, and said his plan included pursuing international investment, strengthening healthcare, and empowering women.

The president's three challengers are relatively unknown in Rwanda and their platforms are virtually identical to Mr. Kagame's. Critics say the purpose of the three candidates is to provide the semblance of opposition.

But Mr. Kagame said his detractors had unfairly condemned him for the weakness of his opponents.

"Let them create the opposition," said Kagame. "In fact, maybe that is what they are trying to do by telling some lies about the situation here. But maybe they can fill the vacuum that they think is there. Do they want an opposition that I should create, or do they want an opposition that should emerge naturally. I do not feel that I am responsible for what the critics are talking about."

The provisional results of today's poll are expected early Tuesday, but President Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front has planned a celebration rally to begin just after polls close.

Rwandan Election Chief Says Kagame Set to Seal Re-Election

VOA

Rwandan election officials say early results indicate President Paul Kagame is headed for a landslide re-election victory.

The head of the election commission Chrysologu Karangwa said Mr. Kagame could tally more than 90 percent of the votes.

Tens of thousands of Kagame supporters packed into Kigali's main football stadium to celebrate the widely expected election win.

Voters turned out in large numbers to cast ballots Monday, many lining up at polling stations before sunrise. Election officials say voting appeared to go smoothly throughout the day.

Mr. Kagame faced three candidates who all have ties to his ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front.

Opponents of President Kagame have denounced the campaign as a "sham." Human rights groups say real opposition groups were barred from fielding candidates.

President Kagame has effectively ruled Rwanda since his RPF ended the country's 1994 genocide more than 15 years ago, in which Hutu extremists killed an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

He has been praised at home and abroad for stabilizing the country, rebuilding its economy and promoting women's rights.

However, rights groups say his government has instituted a climate of repression.

Mr. Kagame and his party won the last poll in 2003, taking 95 percent of the vote.

Rwanda: Grenade Attack Injures Seven After Kagame Declared Winner

Radio France Internationale (Paris)

A grenade attack on the streets of Kigali, the capital of Rwanda on Wednesday night injured at least seven, according to police, just hours after President Paul Kagame was declared winner of the top job in the country. Witness saw two children wounded and one woman who lost an eye, adding that the number of injured was at least 20.

Police say the grenade was thrown near Kigali's main bus station.

The election was highly criticised for lack of real opposition, as the three candidates against Kagame had given their votes to the president in the last election.

The Commonwealth election observers said that the campaign was marked by "a lack of critical opposition votes."

The lead-up to the vote was marked by arrests and killings as members of opposition parties, which were not allowed to register, were not involved in the actual elections.

Questions Remain as Kagame Returns to Power in Rwanda

VOA

Rwandan President Paul Kagame has been returned to power with an overwhelming victory in presidential elections. The leader has another seven years to build upon his impressive programs of social and economic development. The recent campaign, however, leaves lingering doubts about the president's democratic credentials.

The celebration continued into the early hours Tuesday morning, as Rwandans waited for official confirmation of President Kagame's guaranteed victory. The ruling Rwandan

Patriotic Front organized a campaign-style rally in Kigali's Amahoro Stadium to celebrate the outcome as votes were being counted.

Celebrating results

The event was essentially a nine-hour concert. Popular Rwandan musicians entertained the president's faithful as they awaited the results. The announcement of the provisional results, broadcast live to the tens of thousands in the stadium, sent the crowd into frenzy around 4:00 am Tuesday.

The National Electoral Commission's executive secretary, Charles Munyaneza, announced the results. He said that President Kagame "had cruised to victory, winning handily in all eleven provinces and receiving an estimated 92 percent of the overall vote."

The announcement was perhaps only surprising in that the president received slightly less than his 95 percent victory in 2003.

Peaceful vote

It was a fitting end to an exceedingly smooth electoral process. Monday's vote proceeded peacefully and efficiently. Voters cast their ballots early, and long lines were dealt with swiftly. There were no major difficulties reported, and the work of the National Electoral Commission - or NEC - was given an initial stamp of approval by African Union observers shortly after the polls closed.

The group's chief observer, Anil K. Gayan, praised Rwanda and the NEC for the administration of the poll. "The Rwandan voter has attained a degree of critical maturity which is remarkable," said Gayan. "With regard to the technical aspects of the process, I think that we have found nothing irregular and nothing to criticize."

Concern over tactics

But for many, there was a feeling of unease, which belied the perfection of the electoral process. During the vote, there were rumors of polling stations opening early and intimidation at the ballot boxes. In a neighborhood of Kigali, residents reported that members of the Rwandan Patriotic Front were patrolling before 6 o'clock in the morning, using bullhorns to wake Rwandans and remind them to vote.

Rwanda has touted its electronic registration system, but voters were required to stamp thumbprints on their ballots, raising concerns that people voting against the president could be easily traced. Gayan said he raised the issue with the National Electoral Commission, but was assured its motives were not "sinister."

There also were accusations in the lead-up to the election that President Kagame's government was silencing opposition groups and repressing independent media. Organizations such as Reporters Without Borders and Human Rights Watch expressed concern of the suspension of opposition newspapers, such as Umuseso and Umuvigizi. Criticism increased after the murder Umuvigizi's deputy editor in June.

Marked progress amid unease

The arrest and detention of opposition figure Victoire Ingabire garnered further condemnation. Ingabire, a Hutu who recently questioned the traditional narrative of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, was charged with genocide denial, a crime in Rwanda.

Even critical international observers say publications like Umuseso and Umuvigizi were less professional media than sensationalist newspapers. Many average Rwandans also viewed Ingabire as a fringe candidate.

Rwanda has made remarkable strides in the 15 years since the genocide. But the president's consolidation of power has raised questions about its democracy. Mr. Kagame has used this power to push reforms during his 15 years in power, but many wonder what will happen when the popular president is gone.

Rwanda's Kagame Wins 93 Percent of Vote in Re-election Bid

VOA

Rwanda's electoral commission says President Paul Kagame has won 93 percent of the vote in Monday's election to secure a second term.

The commission released the results Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Mr. Kagame danced on stage and thanked thousands of supporters in Kigali's main football stadium, after preliminary results gave him an overwhelming lead.

Mr. Kagame faced three candidates who all have ties to his ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front.

His opponents had denounced the campaign as a "sham." Human rights groups say real opposition groups were barred from fielding candidates

President Kagame has effectively ruled Rwanda since his RPF ended the country's 1994 genocide, in which Hutu extremists killed an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

He has been praised at home and abroad for stabilizing the country, rebuilding its economy and promoting women's rights. However, rights groups say his government has instituted a climate of repression.

Mr. Kagame and his party won the last poll in 2003, taking 95 percent of the vote.

3. Africa-U.S Relations

DRC Welcomes US Support to Defeat LRA Rebels

VOA

A Cabinet minister in the Democratic Republic of Congo says his administration will cooperate with U.S. President Barack Obama's administration as Washington develops a comprehensive strategy to deal with the Lord's Resistance Army rebels (LRA).

Information minister Lambert Mende said the government needs intelligence support in its effort to defeat the LRA rebels, who are accused of killing, mutilating and abducting unarmed Congolese in the northeastern part of the country.

"This is a situation we have been experiencing for a very long time, I think for 10 years. And, we are ending this situation because we have attacked the LRA one time together with our neighbors, the Ugandan army. But now, we are doing it ourselves and we are succeeding. I think a lot of them have fled to Central African Republic, others have met death during combat operations and their actions against our people and against our army are reducing these days," he said.

In its latest report, the Washington-based Enough Project documented 51 attacks by the LRA in Bas Uele, Congo, resulting in at least 105 deaths and 570 abductions during the last 15 months.

The report also said the LRA rebels have used Bas Uele territory region (northeastern Congo) as a base and transit point to the Central Africa Republic and beyond.

It also stated that the threat against unarmed Congolese civilians is increasing, since there is no meaningful military force to challenge the LRA in the area.

"The Congolese army remains a threat to its own population, and the United Nations is drawing down its peacekeepers in this region," the report said.

Information Minister Mende said his government needs help to fight the rebels.

"We welcome this move positively because we needed really to be assisted with all the wars, as not only Congo [is] under threat by those people [rebels] but also Uganda, Central Africa Republic and southern Sudan. So, we need people to assist," Mende said. The LRA rebels originally began their insurgency in northern Uganda, but the group is believed to have killed, mutilated, and displaced thousands of civilians across central Africa for more than two decades.

The rebels abduct thousands of children and turn them into child soldiers.

4. Health

Burundi: HIV-Positive People Struggling for Treatment of Opportunistic Infections

The New Times

Bujumbura — Thousands of Burundians living with HIV are failing to obtain drugs to treat opportunistic infections since a system to provide them with free medical care has come to an end.

The National AIDS Control Council (CNLS) has, for the past two years, provided free medical care to an estimated 22,000 members of the Burundi Network for People living with HIV (RBP+). Under the system, members are issued with cards entitling them to free treatment, which is then billed to RBP+.

However, following the end of the agreement in April 2010, access to these essential drugs has been difficult.

According to one woman, who preferred anonymity, the cards are now virtually useless. "I was getting Bactrim also know as co-trimoxazole, an antibiotic prophylactic to prevent infection and other medicines free of charge; hospital bills were catered for... now I have to pay for everything. They [RBP+] tell us the funding has stopped," she said.

Too poor to pay

Déo Kameya, head of the RBP+ branch in the eastern province of Rutana, told IRIN/PlusNews that out of 500 registered HIV-positive people in the area, about 350 now had to provide for their own medical care.

"If a person living with HIV goes to the hospital for medical care and receives a prescription, if he can afford the price of medicines it is ok, if not, he simply dies," he said. "At present we have nowhere to [go] to get support for them."

Rose Nyandwi, health coordinator in the northern province of Ngozi, said people in her province could not afford the tests required to determine eligibility for antiretroviral drugs (ARVs).

"We direct them to do tests but sometimes we wait for them to bring back results in vain. With such low CD4 counts [a measure of immunity] as 50 or 100... they stay home and die," she said.

Sylvain Ndayikengurukiye, CNLS communication officer, noted that CNLS had recently directed health centres to continue offering medical support free to HIV-positive patients and forward the bills for payment, along with evidence that the stock had been used for people living with HIV.

Kameya said, however, that without official documentation, health centres had refused to implement the measure.

Drug shortages

The problem is compounded by an ongoing shortage of Bactrim and other drugs to treat opportunistic infections. At the Prince Regent Charles Hospital in the capital, Bujumbura, the pharmacy's stock of Bactrim is running dangerously low.

"If there is no new supply, we will not cover this month [August]," said Dominique Surwavuba, head of the HIV unit at the hospital. He added that the unit normally received a monthly supply from the government but in July, there were no new supplies.

"Out of a list of 46 medicines the council [CNLS] is likely to refund the hospital, only five are available... there is little chance for a patient to get it," Nyandwi said.

According to Ndayikengurukiye, the shortage is because all patients, not just HIV-positive people, take medicines for opportunistic infections.

"Take coughing - every patient can cough even without HIV," he said. "Medicines supplied to health structures are used also for other patients; that is the reason the stock sometimes runs out.

"We must ensure that the stock intended for persons living with HIV is really serving them," he added.

CNLS estimates that just 19,000 of 59,000 Burundians needing ARVs could access them. Burundi has struggled to fund its ARV programme after the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria rejected its request for a grant in 2008.

Conflict Fuels High Death Rate, Health Problems in Central African Republic Decades of fighting, plus poverty, create public health disaster, study finds Art

VOA

The Central African Republic has been plagued by poverty and violence for decades. A random household survey examines how the situation has affected residents' physical and mental health.

JAMA, the journal of the American Medical Association, features several research papers focusing on violence as a public health issue.

One looks at how conflict in the Central African Republic has resulted in increased illness, mental health issues, and death rates.

Survey teams did individual interviews throughout the country to compile first-person information, and they recorded their data on smart phones, to protect privacy by not using paper records.

Almost one-third of the people said their physical health was bad or very bad. Symptoms of depression or anxiety were seen in more than half of those surveyed. And lead author Patrick Vinck says the death toll was staggering.

"What we found is that this is one of the countries where the people are dying at the fastest rate that you can imagine," he said.

Researchers adapted smart phones to help record responses, the first time such technology was used to conduct surveys in the Central African Republic.

"It's about five deaths per 1,000 people per month. The equivalent of six percent of the population dying every year. And that mortality rate is comparable to or even higher to what we have seen in eastern Congo or in the Darfur."

Vinck heads the Initiative for Vulnerable Populations at the University of California, Berkeley. He says the deaths and illness they found in the Central African Republic are not all directly caused by the conflict.

"There is really a situation of chronic poverty that underlies the conflict that in many ways is more terrible," Vinck explained. "And the result is that the people have very, very little hope. There is no reason why the international community can not come together to address this conflict and put sufficient pressure on the different actors so that they finally resolve their differences peacefully."

If conflict and violence in the Central African Republic sounds like a story about power and politics, it is. But speaking via Skype, Vinck says that doesn't mean it isn't also a public health issue.

"The reason it was important for us to publish in the journal of the American Medical Association is that war is a major public health problem. The consequences on health are enormous. And whereas mortality is a very obvious aspect of it, there are many, many other consequences."

In addition to the academic paper in JAMA, the journal of the American Medical Association, Patrick Vinck has co-authored a 48-page study of the situation in the Central African Republic, published by the Human Rights Center at the University of California.

6. Militancy, Rebels, Terrorism and the War on terror

Central African Republic: LRA Conducts Massive Abduction Campaign

Human Rights Watch (Washington, DC)

The Ugandan rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has abducted more than 697 adults and children in a largely unreported campaign in the Central African Republic and the neighboring Bas Uele district of northern Democratic Republic of Congo over the past 18 months, Human Rights Watch said today. Nearly one-third of those abducted have been children, many of whom are being forced to serve as soldiers or are being used for sex by the group's fighters.

During the abduction campaign, the LRA has brutally killed adults and children who tried to escape, walked too slowly, or were unable to bear the heavy loads they were forced to carry, Human Rights Watch found in its investigations in the region. The LRA has killed at least 255 adults and children, often by crushing their skulls with clubs. In dozens of cases, the LRA forced captive children to kill other children and adults.

"The LRA continues its horrific campaign to replenish its ranks by brutally tearing children from their villages and forcing them to fight," said Anneke Van Woudenberg, senior Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. "The evidence points to Joseph Kony, the LRA leader, as the author of this atrocious campaign."

Human Rights Watch called on the affected governments and their allies to strengthen their protection of civilians and to put greater emphasis on efforts to rescue the abducted children and others.

A month-long Human Rights Watch research mission to the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Bas Uele district of northern Congo from July 12 to August 11, 2010, in which over 520 civilians were interviewed, including 90 former abductees, in individual and focus group interviews, found that the LRA's abduction campaign was similar in both countries and is having a devastating impact on affected communities.

In southeastern CAR, the LRA began large-scale abductions on July 21, 2009, and to date has abducted 304 people, including many children. The LRA first attacked the villages surrounding Obo, before moving west toward Rafai, Guérékindo, Gouyanga, Kitessa and Mboki, along the Congolese border, and north toward Djema, Baroua, and Derbissaka. Most recently, on June 12 and 13, 2010, the LRA abducted 16 people in farms surrounding the town of Rafai, including a mother and her 2-year-old daughter, both of whom the rebels later killed.

A similar LRA abduction campaign is under way in the remote Bas Uele district of Congo. On March 15, 2009, the LRA attacked the town of Banda, abducting some 80 people. In the months that followed, the LRA progressed westward, conducting raids on

the towns and villages of Dakwa, Bayule, Disolo, Esse, and further north in Digba, Sukadi, and Gwane, among others.

On May 27, 2010, the LRA attacked numerous villages near Ango, the territorial capital, abducting 23 people, including 16 children. Some abductees who later escaped told Human Rights Watch that the LRA questioned them about the location of schools in Ango, indicating the rebels may have been seeking specifically to abduct children. The LRA advance was halted when they encountered Congolese soldiers less than 15 kilometers from Ango, forcing them to change direction.

During the LRA's campaign in Bas Uele between March 2009 and June 2010, the rebels abducted at least 375 people, at least 127 of them children, most ages 10 to 15. More recent information indicates that there have been more LRA attacks.

There has been very little reporting of the LRA's numerous abuses in the region because it is so remote and communications are so poor. Few humanitarian agencies are working there, and there is only a small United Nations presence.

Tens of thousands of people have fled the area. In southeastern CAR an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 people have sought refuge in the main towns, leaving entire villages abandoned. In the last few months, the government has deployed about 200 troops to the area to help protect civilians, too few to provide adequate protection. The Ugandan army has made some troops available to help protect civilians in the area.

Civilian protection concerns in Bas Uele district are even greater. An estimated 54,000 civilians have been displaced in the district or have sought refuge across the border in CAR. The Congolese army has deployed an army battalion to the area, but it is ill-equipped and has little or no transportation and communications equipment.

The UN peacekeeping mission in Congo, MONUSCO, with 19,000 peacekeepers across the country, has only 1,000 in the LRA-affected areas of northeastern Congo – far too few for the scale and geographical breadth of the problem. No peacekeepers are based in Bas Uele district. In the past two months, the MONUSCO base in Dingila, Bas Uele district, was closed and new MONUSCO bases expected to open in Dakwa and Digba have not yet been established.

“The protection of civilians under LRA attack across central Africa is woefully inadequate, with some communities receiving no protection or humanitarian aid at all,” Van Woudenberg said. “National governments, the Ugandan army, and the UN need to take urgent steps to protect people from these LRA attacks.”

A Vicious Abduction Campaign

Human Rights Watch's field investigations have found that LRA combatants often attack villages early in the morning or late in the day, when residents are likely to be home. The LRA fighters grab their victims and tie them to one another at the waist in long human

chains. The abductions are usually followed by extensive looting of food, clothing, salt, and other items, which are loaded in heavy bundles onto the captives' heads, backs, and shoulders before they are marched off into the forest.

A 40-year-old woman from Guerekindo in southeastern CAR told Human Rights Watch how on March 29, 2010, she watched in horror as the LRA tied up her husband and five young children in a human chain, loaded them with the household's goods, and dragged them out of their home. She was left on her own with twin infants and has had no news of her missing family members.

According to former abductees, once away from a main road, the LRA force their captives to work for hours or days shelling peanuts, a staple crop in the area, or pounding rice or manioc to prepare for cooking. Those who work too slowly are beaten. The LRA rebels prohibit captives from speaking to one another and from eating, drinking water, or going to the toilet without permission.

Once the work is completed, some adults may be released, though they are usually viciously beaten or otherwise humiliated first. In Digba, Bas Uele, on September 27, 2009, the LRA whipped each of the 12 Congolese adult abductees with branches, then with a machete after they had worked all night shelling peanuts, before releasing them. A 41-year-old teacher in the group was punished more severely because he spoke English.

In another case, following large-scale abductions in Banda, the LRA forced their Congolese captives to dance for their freedom, releasing some adults only after they had danced for several hours. A woman who was released told Human Rights Watch: "I still remember the horrors of that night and being forced to look happy while I danced for my life. I am terrified that the LRA will come back."

Adults who are not released may be kept as porters, forced to march at a rapid pace to the LRA's next location, heavily loaded with pillaged goods. Those who cannot keep up are killed. On May 6, the LRA killed a 42-year-old Central African man named Bungu near Mesquine, in CAR, who was loaded down with basins of peanuts and bags of rice. When he fell in a swamp area and was unable to get up, an LRA combatant beat him on the head with a heavy wooden club, crushing his skull.

Adults who make it to an LRA camp are often killed instead of released. One 12-year-old Congolese girl told Human Rights Watch that she was forced to participate in killing dozens of adults who had reached an LRA camp to prevent them from revealing its location to government soldiers or the Ugandan army.

"The LRA tied the hands of the victims behind their back, a cord around their legs, and placed the victims face down on the ground," she said. "Then the LRA would give us children a heavy wooden stick and force us to beat them on the head till they died."

Human Rights Watch found that abducted children are usually separated from the adults and kept close to the LRA commanders. They are rarely released. They quickly learn to obey the LRA's rules and to speak Acholi, the commanders' language, and are exposed

to immense brutality to integrate them into the group. The LRA forces many children, as part of their indoctrination, to kill other children who try to escape or fail to obey the rules.

Of the 45 children interviewed by Human Rights Watch, most of those who had been with the LRA a month or more had been forced to kill other children. Human Rights Watch received information of at least 42 children killed by other child abductees in 2009 and 2010, though the figure is probably much higher.

Military training begins within months of captivity. Many children as young as 10 or 11, abducted in Congo, CAR, and Southern Sudan in 2008 and 2009, are now armed with guns and participate in LRA attacks. LRA combatants use mind control methods to get children to forget their lives back home and to view other human beings as animals. Witnesses to LRA attacks and those who were abducted told Human Rights Watch that the young LRA combatants are usually the most vicious and are ordered to carry out the beatings and killings.

The LRA assigns abducted girls to commanders for sex or as servants. Refusing sexual relations often results in death. A 17-year old Congolese girl, Osanna, abducted in Banda in March 2009, protested when a commander tried to rape her. The LRA tied her up and forced other children abducted from Banda to kill her by taking turns hitting her on the head with a heavy wooden stick. Her 12-year-old sister was forced to participate.

Children who escape are deeply traumatized by what they have experienced. One 15-year-old boy who had spent eight months with the LRA before he escaped told Human Rights Watch: "I am no longer the same. I often think about how many people I killed and then I can't sleep. I will never forget what they made me do."

Ordered From LRA's Central Command

The available information strongly indicates that the LRA's central command has been ordering these abductions, which have been conducted in a manner consistent with the LRA's well-established practices. Abductees who spent months with the LRA before managing.

Ordered From LRA's Central Command to escape said the abduction campaign was carried out on orders from Kony that LRA commanders should replenish their ranks.

At least four former abductees who spent months or years with the LRA and had learned to speak Acholi told Human Rights Watch that there was a clear order from Kony to his commanders to abduct children. Some indicated that the abduction campaign was to enable the LRA to return to Uganda. Human Rights Watch has also seen transcripts of two oral messages from Kony in May in CAR, indicating that he continues to communicate with a number of his commanders.

Human Rights Watch research found that the campaign in CAR is led by Gen. Okot Odhiambo, the LRA's second in command, and by LRA groups acting under the direct command of Kony. In Bas Uele, the campaign is led by Lt. Col. Kidega, a senior LRA commander who has a number of smaller LRA groups under his command. Human Rights Watch also received reports of abductions and killings by Gen. Caesar Acelam in the areas around Yalinga and Bria in the Haut-Kotto prefecture of CAR.

Three of the LRA's leaders, including Kony and Odhiambo, are sought by the International Criminal Court under arrest warrants issued in July 2005 for war crimes and crimes against humanity in northern Uganda. All three remain at large and continue to commit atrocities.

Long History of LRA Atrocities

The recent LRA abductions and killings are part of the rebel force's longstanding practice of atrocities and abuse. Pushed out of northern Uganda by the Ugandan military in 2005, the LRA now operates in the remote border area between southern Sudan, Congo, and CAR.

In December 2008, the governments of the region, led by the Ugandan armed forces and with intelligence and logistical support from the United States, opened a military campaign against the LRA in northeastern Congo, known as Operation Lightning Thunder. The military campaign failed to end the violence or to apprehend the LRA's leaders. Instead, the LRA spread out across the central African region and have continued their campaign against civilians.

Human Rights Watch has previously reported on widespread and horrific killings in the Haut Uele district in northern Congo, including two deadly LRA rampages: one over the 2008 Christmas period, when 865 were killed, and a massacre in the Makombo area in December 2009, which resulted in the deaths of at least 345 civilians.

Human Rights Watch has urged the US government to swiftly carry out the legislation signed by President Barack Obama on May 26 to develop a comprehensive strategy to protect civilians in central Africa from LRA attacks, bring LRA leaders implicated in atrocities to justice, and, together with regional governments, end violence by the rebel group.

7. Economy and Energy

Rwanda: Local Mining Firms to Get International Certification

The New Times

Kigali — Rwandan mining companies that comply with internationally accepted standards are to be graded and issued with a certificate of compliance by the end of this year in an effort to improve the performance of the sector.

This follows the launch of a pilot project on mineral certification by the Rwanda Geology and Mines Authority (OGMIR) with the support of the Germany Institute of Geosciences and Natural Resources(BGR) that began in August last year.

Mining is one of the top sources of government revenue.

According to the Director of OGMIR, Michael Biryabarema, the pilot process was completed in February this year with a set of standard guidelines on good practice and supply chains being developed and volunteering companies implementing the guidelines.

"The Mineral sector in Rwanda is advanced in the process of certifying mineral supply chains and upgrading mineral extraction to good practice standards universally accepted," Biryabarema said in a statement.

In a parallel phone interview the Director also observed that certification will be critical for mining companies in order to comply with standards set under a recent American congress legislation on "conflict minerals" signed into law last month.

The legislation defines conflict minerals as coltan, cassiterite, wolframite, gold and their derivatives are financing conflict in DRC or "an adjoining country".

"This is very crucial because the key minerals produced in Rwanda (cassiterite, wolframite, coltan and gold) all fall under the above category."

However, Biryabarema pointed out that government already put in place measures even before the legislation to ensure that all the minerals originating from the country are accounted for and mined with international good practice.

By October 2010, he said, the four volunteering companies will be audited by an (international) external auditor based on international best practices.

"A grade will be accorded to these companies and they will be issued with a certificate of compliance if they perform well," he said.

The legislation requires that consumers and manufacturers including companies like IBM, Intel, Motorola , Apple ,HP and others to determine the mine and location of origin in an effort to ensure that minerals are conflict free.

"This puts another requirement-stakeholders now have a new standard of making sure that they confirm the origin of the minerals," Biryabarema explained.

However, he pointed out that despite the positive spirit of the legislation, the time of compliance given to consumers of these minerals to certify their sources of material is too short.

The legislation requires that within a period of nine months consumers of "conflict minerals" to begin to disclose annually whether the minerals did originate from DRC or "an adjoining country."

Biryabarema argued that enough time is required for companies to put the mineral tracing processes in place since the legislation implies that even minerals produced in countries neighboring DRC have to be certified.

"This calls for the mineral sector in Rwanda to strengthen its capacity in documentation and be in position to satisfy the consumer community. The timing for implementation should be clearly studied to avoid hurting the industry that has no connection to the conflict source whatsoever," he said.

First quarter statistics from the Central Bank indicate that the mining sector grew by 23.4 percent this year with a consolidated turnover of Rwf9.29 billions from Rwf7.53 billions in the first quarter of 2009 as a result of increase in international prices of minerals mostly tin.