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**Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes in
Africa**



MEDIA MONITORING

21 July 2015

GENERAL NEWS

George Clooney launches project to 'end war in Africa'

NEWS STORY

Source: Al Jazeera

21 July 2015 - George Clooney, the Hollywood actor, has launched a new initiative called The Sentry aimed at ending conflicts on the African continent by tracking the money that fuels them.

The Sentry, founded by Clooney and John Prendergast from the advocacy group the Enough Project, will investigate the financing of conflicts in South Sudan, Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Enough Project said on Monday.

Akshaya Kumar, a policy analyst with the Enough Project, told Al Jazeera on Monday the idea for the project came from a dissatisfaction with traditional peacemaking and conflict mitigation approaches.

"We were inspired by the success of financial warfare in the fight to stem terrorist operations, money laundering and drug trafficking," Kumar said.

Prendergast, a former Africa director at the US National Security Council turned human-rights activist, said that "conventional tools of diplomacy" had so far failed and that "new efforts [to end wars] must centre on how to make war more costly than peace".

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"The objective of The Sentry is to follow the money and deny those war profiteers the proceeds from their crimes," said Prendergast.

The Sentry says that their goal is to "dismantle the networks of perpetrators, facilitators and enablers who fund and profit from Africa's deadliest conflicts", which the project identified as South Sudan, Sudan, the CAR and DR Congo.

South Sudan has been embroiled in a civil war since December 2013, while the CAR remains insecure and tense since a coup in March 2013.

The eastern DR Congo remains one of the most volatile regions in the continent, with multiple rebel groups operating along the border with Uganda and Rwanda.

But commentators say The Sentry, as well-intentioned and logically sound as it may be, suffers from the same shortcomings as a number of poorly conceived Western-led projects of the past.

"I don't see much evidence of partnership with Africans in The Sentry, let alone African leadership," Alex Perry, a freelance journalist and contributing editor to Newsweek, told Al Jazeera by email.

"There are plenty of Africans capable of running this kind of initiative - and you have to think that, since they're on the ground, they'd be best placed to do so."

'Laudable impulse'

While acknowledging the initiative was "striking" and an "out-of-the-box" effort, Perry said it would have been better if it had recognised that Africans were best placed to identify and fix their own problems.

"And if you want to do this kind of work (which is a laudable impulse), ask them if they require your assistance and present any ideas you come up with as mere supplementary and subject to their approval," he said.

Kumar rejected this criticism, describing The Sentry as "grounded in close collaboration with African civil society".

"We work closely with local journalists and activists to feed their findings into broader cross-jurisdictional investigations," she said.

Participants in the project include C4ADS, a Washington-based non-profit research organisation, and the activist group Not On Our Watch, co-founded by Clooney and fellow Hollywood actors Don Cheadle, Matt Damon and Brad Pitt.

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In 2010, Clooney and Prendergast initiated the Satellite Sentinel Project, using satellites to map evidence of conflict and human-rights abuses on the ground.

At that time, the fear was of war between Khartoum and Juba as the south prepared for its independence in July 2011.

But in late 2013, civil war broke out inside the new nation of South Sudan and the satellite project was left largely redundant.

The Sentry's first briefing paper on South Sudan was damning.

It described the civil war between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy, Riek Machar, as "a competition among the nation's elite for power and profits," with warring parties fighting for control of "a kleptocratic regime that has captured and controlled nearly all profit-generating sectors of the economy".

Clooney has been criticised on a number of occasions for mixing celebrity with a complex conflict in South Sudan, but Kumar says no one was under the illusion that celebrity activism made him an expert on the matters at hand.

"Mr Clooney hopes to once again deploy his celebrity in service of the people of South Sudan, while making it clear that might require targeting their leaders ill gotten gains and illicit supply networks," she said.

RWANDA

Rwanda launches consultations on Kagame third term

NEWS STORY

Source: AFP

Kigali, 20 July 2015 - Rwandan lawmakers began a national tour Monday consulting people on possible constitutional changes to allow strongman Paul Kagame a third term in power, parliament speaker Donatilla Mukabalisa said.

Last week both houses in parliament voted in support of a constitutional change, backing a petition signed by millions of citizens.

"All lawmakers will go to consult with the population... to ask them their opinion about the amendment - what they expect from this reform," Mukabalisa told AFP.

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Over 3.7 million people -- well over half of the voters -- signed a petition calling for a change to Article 101 of the constitution, which limits the president to two terms, according to Rwandan media.

The consultations, which end on August 11, will guide lawmakers as they draft proposed changes.

Any change to the constitution would require a vote in support by at least three-quarters of both parliamentary houses, followed by a national referendum.

Kagame, 57, has been at the helm of Rwandan politics since 1994, when an offensive by his Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels put an end to a genocide by Hutu extremists that left an estimated 800,000 people dead, most of whom were Tutsis.

As minister of defence and then vice president, Kagame was widely seen as the power behind the throne even before he took the presidency only in 2003, winning 95 percent of the vote. He was re-elected in 2010 with a similarly resounding mandate. The next elections are due in 2017.

From the trauma of genocide, he has been painted as a guarantor of stability and economic development, earning praise from donors -- and his supporters say many in Rwanda view the prospect of his departure as a step into the unknown.

Critics say however that he has silenced the opposition and the media.

Kagame says the decision is for the "Rwandan people".

The move comes amid a wider controversy in Africa over efforts by leaders to change constitutions in order to stay in office.

Neighbouring Burundi has been in turmoil since April when President Pierre Nkurunziza announced his bid to stand for a third term in polls, a move branded by opponents as unconstitutional and a violation of a peace deal that paved the way to end civil war in 2006.

BURUNDI

Voting Begins in Burundi after a Night of Violence

NEWS STORY

Source: The New York Times

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By Marc Santora

21 July 2015 - The polls opened in Burundi on Tuesday morning after a night of explosions and gunfire, as voting began in a presidential election whose results are not in doubt but whose consequences could prove deeply destabilizing.

President Pierre Nkurunziza is seeking a third term in office in defiance of international condemnation and bitter opposition at home. Every major opposition party has boycotted the election.

Several explosions rocked Bujumbura, the capital, overnight, and sporadic shooting could be heard just hours before the polls opened. It was unclear whether anyone had been wounded or killed.

Nighttime violence has become common since the country's current crisis began in April. Soon after Mr. Nkurunziza announced his bid for a third term, people took to the streets to express outrage over what they saw as a clear violation of the country's Constitution. Scores were killed as demonstrators clashed with the police.

In May, a general and former head of the country's intelligence service attempted to oust the president while he was out of the country, but the effort failed. The coup leaders went into hiding, but they have continued to threaten to lead a revolt.

Continue reading the main story [Slide Show](#)

With fear and uncertainty gripping the country, more than 170,000 civilians have fled since April. Often traveling at night, with few possessions beyond what they can carry on their backs, they make their way to the borders of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania.

As many as 1,000 people are entering Tanzania from Burundi each day, according to Doctors Without Borders, which says resources are now stretched to their breaking point.

"In the last two weeks, the number of people streaming across the border from Burundi has almost tripled," the group said in a statement. "We can only expect that number to increase."

Western diplomats said last-ditch efforts to find compromise between the opposition and the ruling party had failed.

The United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, called on the authorities "to do all in their power to ensure security and a peaceful atmosphere during the election" and "to

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refrain from any acts of violence that could compromise the stability of Burundi and the region.”

At a tense meeting Monday with Western officials, officials close to Mr. Nkurunziza made it clear that they planned to change the Constitution to solidify control over the country, according to a person who had been briefed on the negotiations. The government also refused a request to reopen an independent radio station, the person said.

Last month, after parliamentary elections that independent observers condemned as unfair and flawed, Mr. Nkurunziza’s party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy, won a sweeping victory. Since then, the party has sought to strengthen its grip on power and its control over the intelligence and security apparatus.

While there are large pockets of opposition to Mr. Nkurunziza in the capital, he has deep support in other parts of the country. The central theme of his appeal to the people has been simple: During his presidency, there has been no war.

“For the first time, we have had 10 years without bloodshed since independence,” Mr. Nkurunziza told hundreds of supporters on Friday at a campaign rally.

Burundi gained its independence from Belgium in 1962 and has been plagued by war and conflict ever since, often with the two major ethnic groups, Hutu and Tutsi, pitted against each other.

Some 300,000 people died in a decade-long civil war that started in 1993 and only ended after years of often-difficult negotiations.

The gains made in rebuilding this nation since the fighting stopped are now at risk, analysts say.

“Many people are afraid,” said Sarah Jackson, Amnesty International’s deputy regional director for East Africa, the Horn and the Great Lakes.

“The Burundian authorities have crushed demonstrations with lethal and excessive force,” she said. “They continue to arrest and torture protesters and opposition members. People are wondering what the future holds.”

UN chief calls for peaceful elections in Burundi

NEWS STORY

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Source: Xinhua

21 July 2015 - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Monday called upon the Burundian government to strive for a peaceful and secure atmosphere for the upcoming presidential election.

In a statement issued here by his spokesman, Ban urged all parties to "refrain from any acts of violence that could compromise the stability of Burundi and the region."

He said that he has taken note of the indefinite suspension of the inter-Burundian dialogue that started on July 14 under the facilitation of Uganda pursuant to the July 6 recommendations of the Summit of the East African Community (EAC).

"The secretary-general calls on the authorities to do all in their power to ensure security and a peaceful atmosphere during the election," the statement said.

Burundi's presidential camp over the weekend decided to suspend its participation in the political dialogue that began last Wednesday to reach a compromise over points of disagreement on the forthcoming election.

The presidential camp took the decision just three days ahead of the presidential polls set for July 21.

"The secretary-general reiterates his appeal for the resumption of a frank dialogue among all parties and urges them to avoid undermining the progress achieved in building democracy since the signing of the Arusha Agreements," the statement said.

Meanwhile, the secretary-general recalled that the United Nations Electoral Observation Mission, in accordance with its Security Council, has deployed observers countrywide to observe the electoral process before, during and after the election, said the statement.

"He calls on all parties to facilitate their work and calls, in particular, on the government to ensure their security," it said.

Burundi was plunged into a political crisis following the announcement by President Pierre Nkurunziza that he would contest for a third term during the forthcoming presidential election.

The opposition and civil society groups opposed his candidature, arguing that the Arusha Agreement stipulated that presidents serve for only two terms, something Nkurunziza had done since 2005.

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Four candidates have expressed interest in contesting in the July 21 election, including incumbent President Nkurunziza, Gerard Nduwayo of the UPRONA party, Jacques Bigirimana of FNL party and Jean de Dieu Mutabazi of COPA coalition.

Former presidents Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, Domitien Ndayizeye and Jean Minani withdrew their candidature, citing the lack of inclusivity and ideal conditions for holding elections

Explosions, gunfire rock Burundi capital hours before presidential vote

NEWS STORY

Source: AFP

Bujumbura, 20 July 2015 - Explosions and gunfire were heard late Monday in Burundi's capital Bujumbura, hours before polls were due to open in a divisive presidential election, in which Pierre Nkurunziza's is seeking a controversial third term.

AFP journalists heard at least three loud explosions and sustained bursts of gunfire, without being able to determine their origin.

There was no information yet on any casualties. Shots could still be heard shortly before 11:00 pm (2000 GMT) but they had become more sporadic.

Witnesses said unknown assailants in the northern Ngagara suburb had opened fire on police officers, who fired back. At least two blasts were heard in the area.

At least two explosions and shots were also heard in Nyakabiga, to the northeast of the city, and Kanyosha in the south, residents said.

Earlier Monday, a grenade was lobbed from a passing car into a street close to the symbolic Independence Square in central Bujumbura. There were no reports of injuries

The attacks come against the backdrop of roiling tensions over Nkurunziza's quest for a third consecutive five-year term.

The opposition has called for a boycott of Tuesday's election, which is going ahead despite months of violent anti-government protests and appeals from the international community for the incumbent to step aside.

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Burundi elections: Pierre Nkurunziza set to win disputed third term as president

NEWS STORY

Source: The Guardian

As polling booths open in east African nation, former rebel leader's opponents call vote 'theatre' and say third term violates constitution and Arusha Accords

21 July 2015 - Pierre Nkurunziza looks set to win a third term as president of Burundi in elections on Tuesday, three months after his decision to run again plunged the country into crisis.

Nkurunziza and his supporters have put down political resistance, street protests, an attempted coup and an attack by a newly formed rebel group – as well as defying international calls for postponement – in order to open the polling booths across the tiny, land-locked east African nation. The crisis has displaced more than 150,000 and left more than 100 dead.

Opposition candidates boycotting the vote on Tuesday have denounced it as “a piece of theatre”. One candidate, Agathon Rwaswa, said Nkurunziza’s unconstitutional third term would lead to “the self-imposed political isolation of Burundi”. It is already the world’s hungriest and second-poorest country, and half its budget relies on European Union aid.

Poverty, corruption and persecution would only grow if Nkurunziza violated the law to stay in power, Rwaswa said “We must be responsible for the fate of our nation.”

Nkurunziza, a former teacher turned rebel leader, claims that he is entitled to a third term in office since his first was not the result of a popular vote. The constitutional court ruled in April that Nkurunziza could run for a third term. The court’s deputy president fled the country, saying he was being forced to approve the ruling.

Nkurunziza’s opponents have said a third term violates both the constitution – which Nkurunziza has tried and failed to change – and the Arusha Accords, which Burundians regard as their Magna Carta for post-civil war reconciliation and peace.

A last-ditch attempt to hold talks on ending the unrest was suspended on Sunday after the government failed to show up.

A decade of poor leadership had “disqualified the [ruling party] CNDD-FDD in the eyes of the population”, said a former president and withdrawn candidate Donatien Ndayizeye. Consequently, he added, the ruling party was compelled to use force.

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“Don’t play with the eagle – it will tear you apart,” reads a piece of CNDD-FDD propaganda circulating on social media, which depicts an eagle, the party’s symbol, claws outstretched.

Human rights activists said 22 opposition politicians were assassinated during Nkurunziza’s last five-year term, with many more afraid to leave their homes and receiving regular death threats.

On 13 May, renegade generals attempted to overthrow Nkurunziza. The coup failed, but the dissidents have since launched a rebellion. On 10 July there were heavy clashes close to the Rwandan border between the army and an armed group loyal to Gen Leonard Ngendakumana, who participated in the coup. United Nations experts have urged the Security Council to act to prevent “a major conflict of regional proportions”.

“The war will start soon,” said a protester in an opposition neighbourhood of the capital, who claimed to be supporting a rebel army on the Congolese border by delivering medical supplies. “We have to do something. We can’t let them steal our country and rule for another five years.”

The opposition boycotted parliamentary elections on 29 June, granting the ruling party a landslide victory. Independent media has been silenced in the wake of the coup attempt.

On Saturday, the last day of campaigning, Nkurunziza’s supporters went around the capital teaching the electorate – 67% of whom are illiterate – how to vote with a thumb print next to their party’s logo.

Citegetse Bénigne, a women’s representative for the CNDD-FDD, promised peace and employment to a 100-strong crowd. “You put your inky thumb by the ... ?” she shouted. “Eagle!” the crowd roared.

On eve of presidential vote, Burundi opposition urges boycott

NEWS STORY

Source: Reuters

By Clement Manirabarusha and Edmund Blair

Bujumbura, 20 July 2015 - Burundi's opposition has urged voters to follow their lead and boycott the presidential election scheduled for Tuesday, saying the vote will deepen political deadlock in a nation with a long history of political violence and ethnic strife.

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President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to seek a third-term in office has plunged the East African nation into its worst crisis since an ethnically charged civil war ended in 2005. Though street protests and a would-be coup were quelled, almost daily violence has left the country tense.

A grenade exploded in the center of the capital but caused no casualties, deputy police spokesman Pierre Nkurikiye said. Grenade blasts marred a June parliamentary poll, which the opposition also boycotted.

Diplomats worry that the disorder may see Burundi slide back into civil war, a frightening prospect for a Great Lakes region still scarred by the 1994 Rwandan genocide in which about 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed.

Nkurunziza's government has pledged to push ahead with Tuesday's election, ignoring calls from the African Union (AU), United States and other Western powers for the vote to be delayed due to growing insecurity.

Officials have promised a free and fair election.

Charles Nditije, leader of the Uprona party, which is part of the opposition Amizero Y'abarundi coalition, called on foreign governments not to recognize a vote in which Nkurunziza will stand unopposed after the opposition withdrew from the race.

"I am urging Burundi citizens not to go to polls this July 21 which are not democratic," he told Reuters by telephone in the capital Bujumbura.

The electoral commission has said opposition candidates names are already on the ballot paper and any votes cast for them will be counted. The commission also counted votes for the opposition in the parliamentary poll. Nkurunziza's party won.

An AU official on Monday confirmed the regional body would not be sending election monitors to Burundi because "the conditions are not conducive for credible, transparent, free and fair elections".

Jacob Enoh Eben, spokesman for African Union Commission Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, said that if the vote went ahead the AU would meet to discuss the way forward.

Opposition parties say Nkurunziza's re-election bid is unconstitutional and are boycotting the election race. The president cites a court ruling declaring he can run for five more years in office.

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Months of talks between the two sides have yielded almost no results, and the latest negotiations broke down on Sunday when the government mediator did not show up for discussions.

Government spokesman Philippe Nzobonariba said the vote, which was delayed from June 26, would not be put back again and he urged Burundians to go to the polls "en masse to express their legitimate will".

Burundi talks suspended ahead of polls after government fails to show

NEWS STORY

Source: Reuters

19 July 2015 - Peace talks to resolve Burundi's violent political crisis ahead of polls next week were suspended on Sunday after the government side failed to show up, the mediator said.

The crisis was triggered by President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to stand for a third term in an election due to take place on Tuesday. The move sparked weeks of violent street protests and an attempted coup in mid-May.

Opposition parties say Nkurunziza's re-election bid is unconstitutional and are boycotting the election race. The president cites a court ruling declaring he can run for five more years in office.

Dozens of people have already died in protests in the east African nation which emerged from civil war in 2005. Hundreds of thousands have fled to other states with a history of ethnic conflict, including neighbouring Rwanda.

African efforts to cool the Burundi crisis have stumbled, despite calls by the African Union and regional east African states for dialogue.

Crispus Kiyonga, the Ugandan defence minister who chaired the talks, said it was not clear why the government stayed away and said they would resume when it sends representatives.

Government officials were not immediately available to explain their absence.

Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni was appointed the mediator of the crisis but he only chaired the first day of talks between the government and opposition parties, before leaving his defence minister to carry on last week.

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Kiyonga said the dialogue had achieved some agreements before it was halted on Sunday, including the need to disarm illegally armed groups.

"The disarmament should be observed and assisted by the African Union military and human rights experts," he said in a statement, without specifying the groups to be disarmed.

Government critics have singled out the ruling party's youth wing, the Imbonerakure, as one of the illegally armed and trained groups.

Western diplomats refer to it as an armed militia of Burundi's ruling CNDD-FDD party.

The looming presidential elections were likely to trigger major instability and clashes which could spread across Burundi's borders, seven independent U.N. human rights investigators said on Thursday.

Burundi defies violence to hold polls

NEWS STORY

Source: AFP

20 July 2015 - The small, landlocked African country of Burundi holds controversial presidential elections on Tuesday after weeks of unrest that recall its long history of conflict and ethnic massacres.

At least 100 people have been killed in weeks of street protests that erupted after President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to seek a third term in office.

Those protests were brutally suppressed, triggering an exodus of around 150 000 people into neighbouring countries.

Tensions between Burundi's ethnic Hutu majority - some 85 percent of the 10.5 million population - and the Tutsi minority have boiled over repeatedly since independence from former colonial power Belgium in 1962.

In 1972, a failed Hutu-led uprising against the country's Tutsi-dominated leadership sparked a wave of massacres.

Later, the 1993 assassination of the first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, triggered a civil war between the Tutsi-dominated army and Hutu rebels that lasted until 2006 despite several peace deals.

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Today, the fault lines are no longer simply ethnic - both Nkurunziza and his main rival Agathon Rwaswa are Hutus. However, old divisions remain.

Burundi - situated in Africa's Great Lakes region - is both one of Africa's smallest nations at 27 834 square kilometres, and one of its most densely populated.

Farming forms the backbone of the economy, with coffee and tea the key exports. Manufacturing is underdeveloped, and the country suffers from a poor transportation network and government corruption that stifles the private sector.

The nation is green and fertile, but more than two-thirds of the population live below the poverty line, with a gross average national income of just \$270 (249 euros).

Nkurunziza was first elected president by parliament in 2005, as part of the peace process to end the 1993-2006 civil war.

In 2010 he was re-elected, this time by the people. Opponents say a third term would violate the constitution and jeopardise deals ending the civil war that stipulated presidents cannot rule for more than a decade.

Nkurunziza's supporters refute that argument, saying the constitution - which states leaders can rule for two terms after elections by "direct universal suffrage" - overrules earlier agreements.

The international community has repeatedly warned of a risk of violence, with rival parties growing increasingly radical.

The United Nations has said it is particularly worried about the ruling party's youth wing, the Imbonerakure, a fearsome group whose name means "The Watchmen" or, literally, "Those Who See Far".

The Imbonerakure are accused by the UN of being a militia, and have been linked to a string of attacks on the opposition.

AU to deploy human rights observers, military experts to Burundi

NEWS STORY

Source: AP

19 July 2015 - As part of the follow-up and implementation of the relevant decisions of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU), the AU Commission

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expressed its readiness to immediately deploy human rights observers and military experts to Burundi, the AU said in a statement on Sunday. In the statement, the commission recalled the communiqué adopted in Johannesburg on 13 June 2015 in which the PSC requested the immediate deployment of human rights observers and other civilian personnel to Burundi, as agreed in its communiqué of 14 May 2015, as well as that of military experts.

The human rights observers are responsible for monitoring the human rights situation on the ground and reporting possible violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

As to the military experts, they are responsible for verifying, in collaboration with the Government and other stakeholders, the disarmament of militias and other armed groups.

Pursuant to these decisions, on 3 July 2015, the Commission formally contacted the Burundian authorities, informing them of its intention to deploy, beginning from 8 July 2015, a start-up team of human rights observers and military experts from the Commission.

The Commission provided the names and other relevant details of the members of the team.

In response, the Government of Burundi, in a note dated 4 July 2015, requested the postponement of the deployment to any other date after 15 July 2015, when the presidential election was to be held before being eventually postponed to 21 July 2015.

In addition, the Government of Burundi, in a subsequent note dated 8 July 2015, requested that, prior to the deployment, a Memorandum be signed with the Commission to define the rights and obligations of each party.

The statement said, on 15 July 2015, the Commission, again, formally contacted the Burundian authorities and proposed to deploy the human rights observers and military experts starting from 17 July 2015.

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Burundi Vote to Proceed Despite Opposition Withdrawal

NEWS STORY

Source: VOA

19 July 2015 - Burundi's foreign minister says the decision of three opposition candidates to withdraw from the July 21 election is unlikely to affect the credibility of the presidential vote.

The opposition candidates include former presidents Domitien Ndayizeye, Jean Minani and Sylvestre Ntibantunganya. In a statement, the three candidates said the current political and security environment is not conducive to administer transparent, fair and inclusive elections.

Analysts say the withdrawal of the opposition presidential candidates could render the election, illegitimate. But foreign minister Alan Nyamitwe says the opposition leaders are welcome to participate in the vote.

"Nobody has asked them to withdraw. They are invited to participate, but it only an invitation ... [But] if they feel that their participation will change nothing as to their performance, then they need to find good excuses," said Nyamitwe.

Nyamitwe says the reportedly suspended peace negotiations mediated by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, aims to help ease tension before Wednesday's presidential vote.

He says Museveni has urged all the stakeholders not to stop negotiations in an effort to resolve the political challenges the country faces.

"We believe the talks were aimed at helping the parties to find ways of reducing the tensions that some might find in the political atmosphere in the country," said Nyamitwe.

"The key word for us is that we continue to negotiate, even with those issues we believe did not get the satisfaction of one side. There still are so many issues that need to be tackled which have not been resolved yet. But we do not lose hope we will continue to discuss those even after the elections."

Following talks Thursday between representatives of the administration and opposition groups mediated by Uganda's Defense Minister Crispus Kiyonga, the government issued a statement saying the presidential election will proceed on the July 21 rescheduled date, despite the negotiations.

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That led opposition groups to charge President Pierre Nkurunziza's administration has shown bad faith in the peace talks.

But Nyamitwe denied the accusation as without merit. He says the elections will proceed Wednesday to meet constitutional demands, adding the vote has previously been postponed twice.

"I don't think if there is any candidate ready for an election that this date would be an issue. But we do not want to apportion blame here since it will not solve any issue, but we believe that those who are ready would still go for the elections on 21st of July," said Nyamitwe.

"Do not forget that we also have a constitution, which sets the [election] deadline. The minimum that we can accept is the 26th of July because the constitution that provides that the [presidential] election has to take place maximum two months ... and minimum a month ahead of the tenure," said Nyamitwe. "We also have to reserve some space for the poll run off. Don't forget that we also need to reserve a period for petitions if there are any."

3 opposition candidates quit Burundi presidential race predicting it will be unfair

NEWS STORY

Source: AP

18 July 2015 - Three candidates, including two former presidents, announced their withdrawal from Burundi's upcoming presidential race, predicting the contest in this restive African nation will not be free and fair.

The letter announcing their pullout from Tuesday's election is the latest blow to the country's political system which has been rocked by months of violence after the incumbent President Pierre Nkurunziza announced his bid for a third term — a move critics are calling unconstitutional.

Former presidents Domitien Ndayizeye, Sylvestre Ntibantunganya and former Speaker of Parliament Jean Minani said in the letter to the electoral commission that the political and security environment could not guarantee free and fair elections.

Opposition leaders have complained that they have been unable to campaign because of intimidation by government security agents.

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Prosper Ntahorwamiye, the commission spokesman, said Saturday he had received the letter but the names of the candidates will remain in the ballot papers which had already been printed and distributed.

Nkurunziza chose to spend Saturday, the last day of the campaigns, in his home town Ngozi, watching a soccer match between local teams.

Burundi has been tense since April when the ruling party nominated President Pierre Nkurunziza to be its candidate — prompting widespread demonstrations in the capital.

At least 77 people have died in the sporadic demonstrations, which at one point boiled over into an attempted military coup in May that was quickly quashed by pro-Nkurunziza forces.

The opposition says Nkurunziza must go after serving his two constitutionally-allowed terms. The nation's constitutional court has ruled in the president's favor, however, maintaining he is eligible for a third term because he was chosen by lawmakers — and not popularly elected — for his first term.

Nearly 144,000 refugees have fled Burundi since April fearing election violence. Burundi's government and opposition groups are in negotiations aimed at ending the political unrest.

UGANDA

Uganda's Museveni slams UN for failing to take on rebels

NEWS STORY

Source: AFP

Kampala, 18 July 2015 - Uganda's president on Friday accused United Nations peacekeepers of failing to disarm rebels in the east of neighbouring Congo and said his army should be allowed to hunt them down instead.

In an Eid message, President Yoweri Museveni alleged the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) allowed Ugandan Islamist group, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), to operate.

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"ADF was defeated in Uganda, but they are still in DR Congo with the United Nations. You know, the UN sometimes engages in insecurity conservation. They conserve insecurity. They co-exist with ADF," Museveni said.

Museveni said Kinshasa and the UN had denied repeated requests that Uganda be allowed to enter the DRC to fight the ADF in its eastern bases.

"When we say, 'Let's come and help you,' they say, 'We shall do it.' I don't want to quarrel with DR Congo or the UN, but if (ADF) enter Uganda, we shall kill them. It's not good to talk about killing during Ramadan. But that's what will happen," Museveni said.

Uganda sent troops into the DRC during a regional war between 1998 - 2003.

In 2005, the UN's International Court of Justice ruled that Ugandan troops had looted the country's resources, killed and tortured civilians, deployed child soldiers and razed entire villages, and ordered Uganda to pay DRC up to \$10 billion in reparations.

Uganda has denied the charges and so far has refused to pay any reparations.

In his Eid message Museveni said the ADF, whose leader Jamil Mukulu was extradited to Uganda from Tanzania last week, was behind recent killings of prominent Muslim leaders.

He also sought to reassure Ugandan Muslims saying: "You shouldn't be frightened because surely we shall defeat these people."

Uganda sending combat helicopters to Somalia battle

NEWS STORY

Source: AP

Kampala, 19 July 2015 - Uganda will send attack and transport helicopters to bolster its forces fighting the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab insurgency in Somalia, an army spokesman said Sunday.

Lt. Col. Paddy Ankunda said the helicopters would help evacuate the injured, improve communication and carry out operations against the militants.

"Our lines of communication are too long and it's been difficult to evacuate the injured or the sick soldiers. These air assets will boost our operations against al-Shabab," he said.

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The first attempt to deploy helicopters ended tragically in August 2012 when three of the aircraft crashed in neighboring Kenya on the way to Somalia killing seven crew members.

Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Sierra Leone have deployed troops to Somalia as part of an African Union force bolstering the country's weak government against al-Shabab's insurgency.

The African Union troops pushed al-Shabab out of the capital, Mogadishu, in 2011.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

UN condemns surge in armed attacks on main supply route in Central Africa

NEWS STORY

Source: Indian Blooms

The United Nations peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic (CAR) on Monday condemned a recent series of armed attacks perpetrated by rebel elements.

21 July 2015 - "The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) strongly condemns the marked increase of armed attacks on the Main Supply Road 1 (MSR1) attributable to members of the rebel group Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain (FDPC)," said a press release issued on Monday.

The latest incident took place over the weekend when gun shots were fired against a convoy with World Food Programme (WFP) supplies, escorted by MINUSCA peacekeepers, in the North-Western part of the country.

The driver was fatally wounded after being shot by three times in the chest and his truck shoved on the side, causing serious injuries to other passengers.

"This violence goes against the current momentum aimed at peace and national reconciliation following the conclusions and recommendations of the Bangui Forum and of the agreement signed between the government and armed groups on the cessation of hostilities and on disarmament," underlines the Mission.

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MINUSCA added that it will reinforce the “robust measures” aimed at raising the level of security on this vital route that supplies the Central African Republic.

More than two years of civil war and sectarian violence have displaced thousands of people in CAR amid ongoing clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka alliance and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian.

The UN estimates that some 450,000 people remain displaced inside the country while thousands of others have sought asylum across the borders.

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Congo forum opens door to president’s re-election, critics cry foul

NEWS STORY

Source: Reuters

Brazzaville, 18 July 2015 - A mass meeting of politicians, academics and other figures proposed changes to the Republic of Congo’s constitution on Friday, which could pave the way for their veteran leader to stay in power, a move decried by the opposition.

Opposition parties who largely boycotted the “national dialogue” dismissed it as a stage-managed effort to let 71-year-old President Denis Sassou N’guesso get around age and term limits and run again in elections next year.

Political tensions are rising in several African countries where long-ruling leaders are coming up against constitutional limits on their rule.

Dozens have died in Burundi in clashes between security forces and crowds protesting against their president’s decision to stand for a third term.

Rwandan lawmakers this week backed a motion to let President Paul Kagame run again, last year, Burkina Faso’s long-time leader Blaise Compaore surrendered power after days of mass protests against a plan to change his country’s constitution.

N’guesso, who has ruled oil-producing Congo for a total of 31 years during two spells since 1979, is barred by age and term limits in the current constitution from seeking another mandate.

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He has not said whether he will stand again, but his party and other supporters have been calling for a revision of the constitution.

In response, N'guesso called the weeklong national dialogue, involving 629 people from political parties and religious and civil society organisations, to discuss electoral and institutional reforms.

The final declaration from the meeting proposed fixing the minimum age for presidential candidates at 30 without mentioning an upper limit. Among other measures, it also proposed renewable five-year presidential terms, again with no mention of a curb on how many.

“The debate on the constitution is a false debate orchestrated by the presidential majority. The current constitution should remain in place; there is nothing to change in it,” said Joseph Kignoumbi-Kiamboungou from the leading UPADS opposition party, which boycotted the talks.

The central African country's government was not immediately available for comment.

N'guesso has said he expects to hold a referendum to decide on any changes needed to the constitution.

KENYA

Kenya 'homecoming' to cap Obama's Africa tour

NEWS STORY

Source: AFP

20 July 2015 - Barack Obama will make a first presidential pilgrimage to his father's homeland of Kenya this week, the capstone of a weeklong overture to Africa taking in three key nations.

On Monday, Obama will host recently elected Muhammadu Buhari, the president of Nigeria - Africa's most populous nation and biggest economy - at the White House.

On Thursday, he will jet to Nairobi, and from there trace the Great Rift Valley northward to Addis Ababa, becoming the first US president to visit Ethiopia.

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The first African-American president of the United States has visited his ancestral continent four times while in office, but has not yet traveled to Kenya during his White House tenure.

The father Obama has admitted he had "never truly known," was born in Kenya's far west, in a village near the equator and the shores of Lake Victoria.

A pipe-smoking economist, he walked out when Obama was just two and died in a car crash in Nairobi in 1982, aged 46.

Obama's planned "homecoming" was long delayed by Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta's indictment for war crimes by the International Criminal Court.

Those charges, linked to ethnic violence, were suspended last year - in part, prosecutors say, because the Kenyan government thwarted the investigation.

Symbolic

But the suspension has paved the way for the landmark visit and a meeting between the two men.

"It's obviously symbolically important, and my hope is that we can deliver a message that the US is a strong partner, not just for Kenya, but for sub-Saharan Africa," Obama said ahead of the trip.

Trade and security are expected to dominate political discussions. But there will also be a personal and symbolic flavor, even down to the meeting with Kenyatta.

Obama's father was an economist in the government of Kenyatta's father Jomo, who led Kenya at independence from Britain until his death 14 years later in 1978.

The two men did not get on well, with Kenyatta senior sacking Obama senior, and blackballing him for further government jobs, an ostracization that would help fuel alcoholism.

The two presidents will put that aside, as Obama tries to make his mark in Africa.

Obama has sometimes struggled to burnish his legacy on the continent, as the "Great Recession," crises in the Middle East, terrorism and a "pivot to Asia" have all sucked up time and effort.

"This trip is extraordinarily important for the president," said former US assistant secretary of state for Africa Johnnie Carson.

"It's an opportunity to build upon and consolidate his legacy with respect to Africa."

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Diplomatic sources say a debate is raging inside the White House about whether that legacy may include playing a role in solving the conflict in civil war-torn South Sudan.

Tens of thousands of people have died and over two million people have been forced to flee their homes in the nation founded in 2011.

But there are many risks to Obama's deeper involvement, both on the ground and with regard his political standing should he fail.

'Africa rising'

On his first presidential trip to Africa, in 2009, Obama gave a speech in Ghana that spoke to a "new moment of promise" on the rapidly rising continent.

But the rise has been curbed by security problems, as well also corruption and rights abuses, issues that are sure to come up in Nairobi and Addis Ababa.

Kenya has been hit by a string of attacks. In 1998, al-Qaeda-linked militants blew up the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, killing hundreds.

In April this year, Al-Qaeda-affiliated Shebab rebels massacred 148 people at Garissa University, most of them students.

"Since Kenya is on the frontlines of the fight against terrorism, the US is providing equipment and training for our security forces," said Kenyan ambassador to the United States Robinson Njeru Githae.

Also in Kenya, Obama will attend a Global Entrepreneurship Summit, aimed at promoting businesses that promise to lift many more Africans out of poverty and help insulate societies against radicalization.

In Addis Ababa, Obama is expected to address leaders of the African Union, remarks that are likely to touch on Africa's democratic deficit.

More than 50 African and global human rights groups - including Human Rights Watch and Freedom House - have written to Obama to take a democratic message to Africa.

The charges against Kenyatta, and the fact Ethiopia's government won 100% of parliamentary seats in a recent disputed election, has raised questions about whether Obama should go at all.

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SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan government says peace agreement emerges with rebels

NEWS STORY

Source: Sudan Tribune

20 July 2015 - South Sudanese government on Sunday expressed optimism at overcoming difficulties in indirect peace negotiations with the leadership of the armed opposition faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM-IO) led by former vice president, Riek Machar, in ending the 19-month long civil war in the country. The opposition expressed reservations.

Senior members of the South Sudan's governing SPLM party on Sunday said significant progress had been made in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, in the ongoing indirect talks between members of former detainees, currently representing the government, and officials of the rebel movement, without involvement of the mediation of the East African regional bloc, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

"There is a significant progress in the talks and there is a hope peace will come to the country at the end of these engagements at individual levels between and among South Sudanese themselves," Daniel Awet Akot, a senior member of the SPLM and former deputy speaker of the national parliament told Sudan Tribune during an exclusive interview on Sunday.

Akot said the indirect talks between the government and the leadership of the armed opposition spearheaded by the former cabinet affairs minister, Deng Alor Kuol, have been sanctioned by the leadership of the ruling SPLM at the level of political bureau and national liberation council to end the war.

"The leadership is committed to see into that this conflict comes to an end. It is the wish of the SPLM leadership at the level of political bureau and the national liberation council that peace comes to the country after these engagements. Our people want peace and the SPLM wants peace," he said.

The senior party member revealed to Sudan Tribune that all the issues which had been preventing the signing of a final peace agreement had been discussed thoroughly and that participants were getting the rationale of the points which were being raised by each of the two sides in the negotiations.

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“The current engagements have taken the spirit we had in Arusha which led to the signing of the reunification of the SPLM. They are being held in an open and transparent environment. They are held in an environment in which each and every representative shows an interest which puts the supremacy of South Sudan over and above each and every interest of any one in the engagement, which is the spirit we had in Arusha,” Akot added.

Presidential advisor on intergovernmental linkage and decentralization affairs, Tor Deng Mawien, also told Sudan Tribune in a separate interview on Sunday that he hoped peace would come to the country soon.

“There is no reason for peace not to come to the country. The government is ready and it has made it a principle to end this war through peaceful dialogue. The president himself had attended the talks several times. This is indication that the government wants this conflict to be brought to an end through peaceful dialogue. The rebels should reciprocate if they are also [for] peace,” Mawien said on Sunday.

The top presidential aide expressed optimism of the peace coming to the country before the end of the year, stressing the peace process being led by the intergovernmental authority on development should extend support to the current indirect engagements between officials of the rival warring parties.

“IGAD should support the current engagements between and among South Sudanese. IGAD came in because there was no one ready to do these kinds of engagements. They should now come with the support. People need peace. War has done so much harm to the people and the country,” a close ally to president Kiir said.

The officials however made no references to specific outstanding issues which have now been agreed upon and when the peace agreement would be signed, but expressed optimism peace could be signed before the end of the year.

SPLM-IO EXPRESSES RESERVATIONS

The armed opposition faction (SPLM-IO) led by former vice president, Riek Machar, also welcomed the indirect engagement between the two warring parties but expressed reservations over what they said was lack of seriousness by officials of the government to keep to the spirit of negotiations in good faith and to hold to their words.

“Well, our leadership welcomes such indirect and informal engagements with representatives of the government. Nevertheless, there is a serious concern about contradictions within the government. One says this and another says completely different things when it comes to the contentious matters in the peace negotiations.

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They should be negotiating in good faith and hold to their words,” Machar’s spokesperson, James Gatdet Dak, told Sudan Tribune when contacted on Sunday.

Dak said senior government officials have been going public with different comments, raising doubts whether the regime could be trusted.

“You know, former detainee Comrade Deng Alor and some of his colleagues, including the reinstated SPLM secretary general, Comrade Pagan Amum, briefed our leadership in Nairobi three weeks ago. They told us, for example, that Salva Kiir agreed on the IGAD Plus executive power-sharing proposal which gives a new position of first vice-president to our movement during a transitional period. They also said Kiir equally agreed on the idea of two separate armies at least for 18 months of the would-be transitional period,” Dak said.

“But see what president Kiir said thereafter, denying almost everything, except for the reinstating position of the party. And look at the comments uttered on Friday by the vice president, Comrade James Wani Igga, totally rejecting the proposal on the top executive power-sharing. I believe the government has been applying this delaying tactic of sending one to us to agree on matters which the rest of the leadership would later on disown.”

He said the rebel faction was committed to the peace process to “swiftly” end the war, despite now dealing with an “illusive” and “illegitimate peace partner” who could not be easily trusted.

He however said the armed opposition faction maintained its call on president Kiir to step aside after expiry of his term of office and for the international community to declare his government illegitimate, saying only a peace agreement would legitimize a transitional government of national unity.

Direct peace negotiations that will involve the two principal leaders, Kiir and Machar, are expected to resume in mid-August under the mediation of IGAD Plus, which will involve countries and bodies beyond the African continent.

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South Sudan army denies presence of rebels around Juba

NEWS STORY

Source: Sudan Tribune

20 July 2015 - South Sudanese army dismissed as "unfounded" allegations reports claiming presence around national capital members of armed opposition fighters allied to the former vice president, Riek Machar.

The rebel faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM-IO) led by former vice president, Riek Machar, said having forces around the South Sudanese capital, Juba, but could not claim responsibility for the recent attack on Juba-Kajokeji road.

"Yes, we have a presence around Juba. We have forces south and north of the capital. We are organizing a military base on Juba-Yei road," rebel leader's press secretary, James Gatdet Dak, told Sudan Tribune.

Dak however said his office had not received report that the rebels were responsible for the Saturday attack which left 5 people dead and 7 others wounded on Juba-Kejokeji road.

"There is no presence of Riek Machar rebels in central Equatoria. What has been happening along Juba-Nimule and Juba-Yei roads are activities of bandits, spokesperson of South Sudanese army," Colonel Philip Aguer told Sudan Tribune on Monday.

"They (rebels) just want to cause panic to the people and to create illusive and imaginary existence. And I want to assure our population that the rebels are not in anywhere in the whole of central Equatoria. These allegations are unfounded," further said Aguer.

The military spokesperson added that the rebels are just spreading rumours as part of their propaganda machine and wondered "where their forces operate?"

The rebel spokesperson said their forces would be targeting the capital and other towns in Central Equatoria state including military installations and outposts in the area.

But, Central Equatoria state deputy governor Manase Lomole Waya also denied in a separate interview when asked to comment on the allegations. However, he was keen to lay the blame of the reported incidents on armed pastoralists.

"This is a question you can ask the army. I don't know anything about these allegations. The army spokesperson or may be other officials from the security and defence can

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answer. What I know is that there have been incidents caused either by criminals or armed pastoralists”, said Waya without giving further comments on the issue.

Reports say the SPLM-IO deputy leader Alfred Lado Gore, was recruiting youth members from areas in south and south west of Juba town into rebellion.

Observers say clandestine recruitment with central Equatoria state into rebellion cannot be ruled out, given the wide spread dissatisfaction with the performance of the government under President Salva Kiir.

IGAD Sets Deadline for Final South Sudan Peace Deal

NEWS STORY

Source: VOA

18 July 2015 - The East African bloc IGAD, which has been trying for 18 months to restore peace in South Sudan, said this week that a final peace deal for the young nation will be signed on Aug. 17.

An agenda sent out this week by IGAD indicates that peace talks for South Sudan will resume at the beginning of August, after South Sudanese negotiators have consulted with their leaders about a compromise agreement for South Sudan that IGAD has put together.

IGAD lead mediator Seyoum Mesfin said this week a draft of the compromise deal will be handed over next Friday to negotiators for the South Sudan government, former vice president Riek Machar’s armed opposition movement, and a group of former political detainees at a ceremony in Addis Ababa.

Seyoum said the handover ceremony will also be attended by representatives of IGAD Plus, which is made up of the United States and its South Sudan troika partners, the United Kingdom and Norway; the United Nations; the European Union; the African Union, China, and five African nations.

Seyoum did not go into detail about what the compromise agreement includes.

What will hopefully be a lasting peace agreement to end the conflict will be signed in mid-August, 20 months after South Sudan plunged into violence in December 2013.

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The last round of talks in March was supposed to be the final chance for President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar to reach a binding peace deal. But those talks sputtered to an end in Addis Ababa on March 6, with no peace agreement signed.

South Sudan vice president criticizes rebel leader for habitual defections

NEWS STORY

Source: Sudan Tribune

18 July 2015 - South Sudanese incumbent vice president, James Wani Igga, said the rebel leader, Riek Machar, had historical habit of defecting and forming his own group, saying he should not be given another chance as the country's second in command.

He said the opposition leader had missed his chance to regain the position of the vice president after rebelling for the third time.

"Why should he be given another chance," Igga said, referring to the proposed power-sharing agreement which designated Machar as the first vice president.

Igga, who has been loyal to President Salva Kiir, was making the comments while addressing members of the Muslim community in Juba at the Freedom Hall on Thursday.

He accused the rebel leader of continuing with the war while he had been reappointed as first deputy chairperson of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) party in government according to the Arusha accord.

"Somebody is still fighting you and you are reappointing him. This is not in good faith," he said.

He narrated that Machar in 1991 rebelled against late John Garang who founded the SPLM in 1983, saying he and Lam Akol also split.

Igga added that Machar also defected from president Omer Hassan Al-Bashir's government after working with the Sudanese president "for 11 years." Now, he added, he again defected from president Kiir's government.

"This is a difficult person," he said.

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The comments slightly differed from the vice president's previous statements which accepted Machar back to the positions of the first deputy chairman and deputy president after Kiir.

Last month his press secretary said the incumbent had accepted to step aside and buy back Machar with his position in order to reach a peace agreement.

The two warring parties are expected to resume negotiations in August to try to thrush out their differences including on power sharing arrangements.

SUDAN

Sudan's dialogue body ready to meet rebels and opposition abroad: official

NEWS STORY

Source: Sudan Tribune

20 July 2015 - A member of the dialogue coordination body known as 7+7 has expressed readiness to hold a pre-dialogue preparatory meeting with the political forces and armed groups refusing to join the process abroad.

Last April, the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) announced that it has indefinitely suspended the pre-dialogue preparatory meeting that was scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa after the government and its affiliated political parties refused to attend.

The panel led by former South African president Thabo Mbeki had invited parties participating in the national dialogue process launched by Sudanese president Omer Hassan al-Bashir as well as non-participants that include rebel groups.

However, the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) declined to participate in the meeting blaming the AUHIP for not extending an invitation to the 7+7 committee and saying they would not take part in such a meeting before the general elections.

Since then, the Sudanese government and the dialogue political parties insisted that dialogue must be held inside Sudan in order to avoid foreign interventions.

But the chairman of the National People's Alliance (NPA) and co-chair of the 7+7 subcommittee for creating conducive climate for the dialogue from the opposition side,

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Osman Abu al-Magd, stressed that the dialogue opposition parties wouldn't mind engaging in a consultative pre-dialogue meeting with the opposition forces and rebel groups abroad.

He said the meeting would be held within the frame work of creating conducive environment for holding the dialogue and in order to determine positions and visions to launch the dialogue, stressing the dialogue must be held inside Sudan.

Abu al-Magd said the upcoming meeting of president Bashir with the 7+7 committee would set the starting date of the dialogue, noting the dialogue's body will submit to the president its proposed date for the beginning of the dialogue in order to approve it.

He pointed that the meeting between the leader of the Popular Congress Party (PCP) Hassan al-Turabi and the dialogue opposition parties had discussed ways for pushing forward the dialogue process and implementing its outcome, adding the dialogue committees would contact the armed groups to join the peace process.

The 7+7 member further asked the various political parties and rebel groups to abandon their narrow personal and partisan interests and come to the negotiating table to discuss all Sudan's issues in order to achieve peace, stability and development.

Meanwhile, the PCP political secretary and member of the 7+7 committee, Kamal Omer, expected that dialogue would be resumed at the end of this month, saying all procedures pertaining to the launch of the dialogue have been completed.

He told the pro-government Ashorooq TV website that the names of the 50 national figures and conciliators of the dialogue have been determined, saying that reports of the dialogue subcommittees were also approved.

Omer stressed the need to release political detainees and convicts and offering guarantees for the rebels' delegates who would participate in the dialogue, noting that Bashir's address on the occasion of the Eid al-Fitr has enhanced the call for dialogue.

The 7+7 member also pointed that the previous days saw positive moves pertaining to contacts with the armed groups in order to secure their participation in the dialogue.

He renewed his party's call for all parties refusing to engage in the dialogue, urging them to join the process in order to achieve the national consensus.

Bashir launched the national dialogue initiative in January 2014 in which he urged opposition parties and rebels alike to join the dialogue table to discuss all the pressing issues related to peace and constitutional reforms.

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But the initiative faced serious setbacks after the government refusal to create suitable atmosphere by releasing political prisoners, ensuring freedoms, and postponement of elections.

RENEWAL OF THE GENERAL AMNESTY

The secretary-general of the council of the national unity government parties, Aboud Jabir, has appealed to president Bashir to renew the general amnesty for the arms bearers and exiled opposition leaders.

Jabir, who is also a member of the 7+7 committee, told the official news agency SUNA that the Sudanese people need to achieve national consensus more than ever, saying it is the only available option to resolve Sudan's problems.

He pointed out that the comprehensive national dialogue became a reality, demanding all parties to make major concessions to serve the national interests.

The member of the dialogue coordination body further called upon the leader of the National Umma Party (NUP), Sadiq al-Mahdi, to return to the country to work with all political forces to achieve the national consensus.

The NUP leader left the country in August 2014 after a month in jail over remarks he made against the government militia known as the Rapid Support Force (RSF).

Since then he has remained abroad based in the Egyptian capital of Cairo. The Sudanese president vowed to arrest him after the signing of Paris Declaration with the Sudanese rebel groups in Paris on 8 August 2014.

Recently al-Mahdi said he intends to gather opposition forces and civil society groups in a new coalition called Future Forces. The new formation will be committed to the "Sudan Call" declaration signed with the rebel umbrella Sudanese Revolutionary Forces and the left groups of the National Consensus Forces.

Jabir called upon Bashir to renew the general amnesty for the armed bearers and external opposition, praising his recent call for resuming the dialogue and achieving the national comprehensive consensus.

He asked the dialogue coordination body to redouble its efforts to convince those boycotting the dialogue including the rebel groups and external opposition to take part in the process.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the Union of the Nation's Forces (UNF) and member of the 7+7 committee, Mohamed Abdel-Jabar, said the roadmap approved by the committee has set the foundation and created a conducive environment for the dialogue.

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He saw that the call for overthrowing the regime would lead to a civil war, underscoring that his party doesn't support regime change but seeks to complete the dialogue process in order to secure the future of the country.

TANZANIA

Raila holds talks with CCM presidential nominee John Magufuli

NEWS STORY

Source: Standard Digital (Kenya)

19 July 2015 - Tanzania presidential nominee, Dr John P Magufuli, yesterday hosted Opposition leader Raila Odinga in Dar es Salaam city, only a couple of days after securing the all-important ticket of the ruling CCM party.

Raila was received in the morning at Julius Nyerere International Airport's Terminal One, by Magufuli himself – a longtime personal friend and political soul mate. The encounter between the two leaders was non-publicised and neither party gave an official statement on the meeting. The meeting was such top secret affair that one of the online papers in Tanzania broke the news in Kiswahili, "Raila Odinga atua Dar es salaam kumtembelea Magufuli kwa kificho kikali". Contacted earlier on his whereabouts, the Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD) leader's official spokesman, Dennis Onyango, told The Standard On Standard that Raila had flown to Tanzania but made no mention of the country's presidential candidate. However, Onyango explained that the former Prime Minister was on his way to the neighbouring Zanzibar country to attend a Global Peace Leadership Conference. But while in Dar es Salaam, Raila was expected to watch the football match between premier league Champions, Gor Mahia, and Tanzania's champions, Yanga, in the ongoing CECAFA Club championships. Magufuli is a close friend of Raila and at the start of the year he represented outgoing President Jakaya Kikwete at the funeral of Raila's eldest son, Fidel Odinga, where he delivered strong political statement in support of "my brother Raila".

Curiously, both leaders have served as Cabinet ministers in the ministry of Roads and Public Works in their respective countries. They share a strong belief in the fact that infrastructural development is key creation of employment opportunities. Magufuli has since 2007 backed Raila's quest for presidency, endorsing his candidature in 2007 and in 2012. By virtue of clinching the ticket of the popular CCM party, Magufuli himself is considered by pundits more or less as President-elect already.

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Speaking from Nairobi, following his nomination, Raila hailed Magufuli's nomination describing him as an experienced and visionary leader who has the political maturity and know how to lead.