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



MEDIA MONITORING

30 March 2015

COMESA urges urgent need to end Africa's wars

Source: Daily Mail (Zambia)

Addis Ababa, 29 March 2015 - The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) has called on member states to exploit the region's distinctive competences strategically and with determination if the set target to end war is to be attained by 2020.

Speaking at the 14th meeting of COMESA ministers of foreign affairs, which opened yesterday, COMESA secretary general Sindiso Ngwenya said it was urgent to manage and resolve existing conflicts.

"It is equally important that at the same time efforts are made to ensure that the factors that lead people to pick up the guns are addressed comprehensively so that as we move towards 2020 any conflicts that are resolved should remain resolved," Mr Ngwenya said.

The meeting was held under the theme 'Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialisation'.

The 50th anniversary of the organisation of the African Union, the Heads of State and Governments set a target to end war by 2020.

He said as a result, COMESA has prioritised the development of programmes on postconflict reconstruction and development.

"Through our trade for peace programme, we have been supporting border communities at the Great Lakes Region to increase their benefits from trade," he said.

This is by firstly packaging information about trade and making it more accessible to small-scale cross-border traders.

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Mr Ngwenya said COMESA has established 10 trade information desks at various border posts of the Great Lakes Region.

“These have been instrumental in not only providing such information as pricing, taxes and market but also to sensitise traders about tools such as the simplified trade regime,” he said.

Mr Ngwenya said COMESA has this year started another phase of the programme, which is aimed at reinforcing infrastructure at these border posts, starting with the reconstruction of border offices at Goma and Kavimvira in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to serve traders more efficiently.

This is being done with support from the KfW Bank done under the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture.

During this phase, markets will also be constructed at Goma, Rabavu, Gatumba and Kavimvira at approximately US\$3 million dollars.

“We are hoping that investing in empowering our communities at the border area and encouraging interaction between them will be an incentive to avoid getting into activities that can disrupt the benefits accrued from trading relations,” he said.

Mr Ngwenya said COMESA is also investing in an early warning system that is able to provide indications about structural factors that need to be addressed long before they manifest.

And Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs Berhane Gebre- Christos said there is need to redouble efforts to strengthen the requisite mechanism for conflict prevention.

“It is obvious that the threat posed by groups such as Al Shabab, AQIM and LRA is not only the problem of a few countries and regions but each and every one of us, our counter terrorism should begin from a clear understanding of this fundamental reality and we should all demonstrate a firm commitment to fight this menace,” Mr Gebre-Christos said.

Zambia [was] represented by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Rayford Mbulu and other senior Government officials.

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AU urges respect of laws during Burundi's elections

Source: Xinhua

Visiting African Union Commission Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma has urged the respect of the Arusha Agreement and the National Constitution during Burundi's forthcoming elections, the AU chief said Friday [27 March] after meeting Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza.

27 March 2015 - "The African Union (AU)'s stand is that existing laws like the Arusha Agreement, the National Constitution and other local laws in Burundi must be observed. It's not for us (AU) to choose this or that law, but what is crucial is that the law must be respected," said Dlamini-Zuma.

According to her, one of the most important things is that Burundi has gone out of conflict and that it "must remain peaceful".

Dlamini-Zuma stressed, "Everybody — from the government to the civil society — must do everything to maintain peace or do nothing that will endanger peace."

She indicated that there should be "confidence and a sense of security" in the country (Burundi), in the parliament and in the government.

"We both agreed that Burundi needs peace more than any time. As there is peace, it must be maintained at all costs and at all times," she said.

The Burundian opposition, the Roman Catholic Church, most civil society organizations as well as dozens of officials in the country's ruling party, the Council for the Defense of Democracy- Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), are opposed to the third term of Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza during the forthcoming presidential election.

While suggesting that a president (of Burundi) cannot serve the country for more than two terms, the Burundian Constitution is not clear on how many terms Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza has already served, as he was elected by the Parliament in 2005 and directly re-elected by citizens in 2010.

The Arusha Agreement however stipulates that no president should go beyond two terms of five years each.

Burundi is to hold this year general elections between May and September, with the presidential election to be held on June 26.

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Burundi's president calls on citizens to participate in country's elections

Source: Xinhua

Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza on Friday signed a decree where he called on the east African country's citizens with the voting age to massively participate this year in the communal, legislative, presidential and senatorial elections.

29 March 2015 - The decree stipulates that all polls will take place between 06: 00 and 16:00 local time, but the head of a polling station can decide whether the poll can be extended to 17:00 or beyond "depending on circumstances."

The decree also stipulates that Burundian citizens with the voting age (18 years) are invited to participate in the communal elections that will be combined with legislative elections on May 26.

Applications from political parties, coalitions of political parties or independent candidates should be received between March 30 and April 8.

The decree also stipulates that at least 100 candidates will be elected MPs during the legislative elections.

It adds that they will be elected from the country's 18 provinces depending on the size of the provinces.

The presidential election will take place on June 26 and the run-off is due on July 27.

Applications for the presidential election will be filed at the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) from April 30 to May 9.

According to the decree, the senatorial elections will take place on the 18 provincial chief towns on July 17 and voters will be members of communal of communal councils that will have been elected on May 26.

Applications will be received from June 1 to June 15.

Burundi's Catholic Church steps in as leader hangs tough

Source: AFP

Kiryama (Burundi), 29 March 2015 - The Sunday service at the hill-top Kiryama church was packed as Catholic Archbishop Simon Ntamwana delivered a sermon, and a political bombshell, for the small central African nation of Burundi.

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Addressing a congregation of hundreds in his central Burundi parish, Ntamwana read from the Old Testament story of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah who rebelled against God and brought destruction on his kingdom.

"We cannot choose other paths than those of love and of mutual respect for the principles that govern our country," he said.

To his congregation the message was clear: President Pierre Nkurunziza must not stand for re-election in June.

Days before, leaders of the influential Catholic Church penned a newspaper commentary criticising the president's desire for what opponents say would be an unconstitutional third five-year term.

In the article, Burundi's Catholic leaders warned that the country must not "fall back into divisions, clashes or war" and recalled that a peace deal that ended the civil war in 2006 and put Nkurunziza in office only allowed for two terms.

Officials from Burundi's ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, admit the statement has caused "immense damage" to the presidential camp, already hit by accusations of running an election campaign characterised by censorship and repression.

"Catholics represent between 75 and 80 percent of the population, so it is a social force, an influential force," said Julien Nimubona, a political science professor at Burundi University in the capital Bujumbura.

Nimubona said religion can be brought to bear on politics, pointing out that Nkurunziza, a born-again Christian, had once claimed a "gift from God" to govern.

Innocent Muhozi, a prominent figure in Burundian civil society, said because the Catholic Church "rarely emerges from its position of keeping a distance from politics", people listen when it does.

"In all major crises we've had, the Catholic Church has played a rather positive role," said Muhozi. "Every time the state was going crazy, the church has tried to calm it down."

- A history of conflict -

In 1972, the Church was quick to condemn the ethnic massacres and repression of the Hutu elite. Although criticised by some for not being outspoken enough, private Church correspondence show priests were wary of aggravating the situation.

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The Church's opposition continued in the 1980s, against coup leader Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, who was forced out in 1987.

During the 1993-2006 civil war, the Church denounced a coup against the first elected president of the country, Melchior Ndadaye, and the subsequent wave of killings.

Occasional forays into the political arena have cost the Church dearly.

Archbishop Joachim Ruhuna was murdered in 1996 by the CNDD-FDD, the Hutu rebel group that went on to become the current government, after he condemned the killing of hundreds of ethnic Tutsi refugees. Seven years later Irish Archbishop and Vatican envoy Michael Aidan Courtney was murdered by different Hutu rebels.

Attacks against the Church have continued into peacetime, most recently in September when three Catholic nuns from Italy, aged between 75 and 83, were murdered at a convent north of Bujumbura. Mystery still surround the unsolved case, with some accusing Burundi's intelligence services of involvement.

With rare exceptions, "the Catholic Church has always been in conflict with the government," said Nimubona.

With elections due in June and the Church having so clearly stated its opposition to Nkurunziza's third term bid, the Church's level of influence will soon become clear.

"We'll see," said Nimubona, who said religion is just one factor in the election, alongside social divisions including ethnic sectarianism, and day-to-day issues such as unemployment and food prices.

But even in the ruling party stronghold where Kiryama church is located, the message was getting through.

"The Church, I support it," said Longin Ciza, a farmer. He said he was happy with the new roads and free schools that Nkurunziza has delivered since 2005, but said it was nevertheless time for him to go.

"When you work on something for 10 years, if you continue, you might ruin everything," he said.

Burundi president must do the right thing

Source: Business Day Live (<http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/2015/03/30/burundi-president-must-do-the-right-thing>)

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By John Stremlau

30 March 2015 - SA [South Africa] gained universal acclaim for brokering a ceasefire among Burundi's main warring Tutsi and Hutu factions in 2000, and then with diplomatic tact and tenacity helped forge and sustain a complex power-sharing agreement enshrined in the 2005 constitution, since tested in two national elections. But all this is now under threat.

Burundi is still an economically weak, politically fragile state of 10-million people — 85% Hutu, 14% Tutsi. In 1972, the Tutsi-dominated army massacred about 200,000 Hutu civilians in response to earlier atrocities committed by Hutu insurgents, followed by more than 30 years of conflict and mass violence that a 2003 international commission estimated killed more than 500,000 people.

SA's role began in 1998 with the United Nations (UN)-approved appointment of then president Nelson Mandela as special mediator, succeeding the late Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. Mandela and his team were able to get 13 of the 19 warring Tutsi and Hutu factions to agree to a ceasefire and a process aimed at forging an inclusive, rights-based, constitutional framework, with provisions for new national elections. Then deputy president Jacob Zuma succeeded Mandela as lead mediator and he was eventually followed by the safety and security minister Charles Nqakula, who secured the latest ceasefire signed in 2008, with the last holdouts disarming in 2010.

I recall once being among a group of academics whose views Zuma sought on how to break one of many of Burundi's deadlocks, only to be dazzled by his detailed grasp of complex interests and the roles of each faction leader. Asked what it would take to get a deal, Zuma replied with a smile: "The equal of 20 ANC cadres!" Yet, through dogged SA diplomacy, deals were cut and Burundi has enjoyed the most peaceful decade since its independence from Belgium in 1962.

At the heart SA's diplomacy was ensuring a fair sharing of power for the majority, with adequate guarantees for minority rights. All eventually agreed to a 60-40 Hutu-Tutsi representation in the transitional legislature and a complex set of checks and balances, including provisions for supermajorities to change the constitution, two vice-presidents and constraining a majority-elected executive with a two-term limit.

President Pierre Nkurunziza has adhered to this agreement since his election in 2005 and his ruling party, the Council for Defence of Democracy-Forces for Defence of Democracy has maintained broad national support while lowering ethnic tensions. Political competition to gain and hold power is intense amid reports of rising corruption and claims that Nkurunziza and his clique are becoming autocratic.

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Nkurunziza appears poised to defy or change the constitution and stand for a third term in the June 26 election. Burundi's influential Roman Catholic Church and other religious and civic leaders have already publicly urged him not to run again. The US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, delivered a similar message to Nkurunziza while in Burundi earlier this month.

SA's stake in Nkurunziza adhering to the constitution goes beyond preserving the peace in Burundi. Democratic Republic of the Congo President Joseph Kabila may attempt to stand for a third term next year, risking an escalation of violence in his country, where SA also made a major diplomatic and financial investment in securing peace a decade ago. Congo Republic's Denis Sassou Nguesso is also seeking an unconstitutional third term next year.

In the coming weeks, Nkurunziza must declare his intentions under the electoral rules and allow for the selection of a new party leader should he wisely step aside. Let's hope SA's political leaders and diplomats are working their Burundi networks and doing their utmost to persuade him to do the right thing and to set a good example for the Great Lakes Region and beyond.

• *Stremlau is visiting professor in the Department of International Relations at Wits University.*

At least 18 killed in Burundi landslides

Source: AFP

Bujumbura, 30 March 2015 - Landslides in Burundi have killed at least 18 people with 10 more missing after torrential rains, a local governor said Monday.

"It is a disaster... dozens of houses were destroyed, crops have been washed away," said Jacques Minani, governor of the Bujumbura district, some 35 kilometres (20 miles) south of the capital.

He said rescue teams are "searching the area to try to find the missing" after the landslides overnight Sunday.

Twelve people died sheltering inside a church in the village of Rutunga, while others were killed inside their homes or simply swept away by rivers of mud, Minani added.

Mud and rocks loosened by heavy rains were swept down steep hillsides of the rural region of the small central African nation, destroying houses in its path, he said.

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Rwandan president condemns violence against women

Source: Xinhua

Rwandan President Paul Kagame has strongly condemned violence against women in the country and those responsible will face justice and pay heavily for their deeds.

29 March 2015 - He made the remarks on Saturday night while speaking at the dinner gala organized by the Rwandan women grouped under an umbrella association “Unity Club”, in an event held in the Capital Kigali.

Unity Club is a Rwandan non-government organization made up of female spouses of former and current cabinet ministers as well as former and current women ministers.

The club’s mission is to harness unity and peace as a strong foundation on which to build sustainable national development. The Club’s Executive Committee is headed by the Rwandan First Lady, Jeannette Kagame.

Kagame said that in Rwanda, ending violence against women and girls is a moral duty, a legal obligation of everybody.

“It should be clear that Rwandans need to respect each other and their spouses. Gender based violence will not be tolerated at all. Violence against women is not a Rwandan culture. We have a responsibility to apply the law to end it,” he emphasized.

Kagame observed that for the past years the campaign against gender based violence has resulted in an unprecedented level of coordination among Rwandan citizens.

“I encourage men and women to continue working together so that our children may have good families and a bright future. Men and women should both complement each other. We cannot lose our focus or determination, despite the encouraging results, that have been recorded in Rwanda.”

“It is said that men are the head of families, but you must know that women are the heart of our families not assistants,” The President noted.

Kagame stated that any place, that does not make gender equality a priority, is probably getting other important things wrong too.”Promoting gender equality does not take place in isolation. It is an integral part of our national commitment.”

He thanked members of the Unity Club and other Rwandans who have dedicated their time to promote unity and reconciliation in the Rwandan society.

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Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa, First Vice-Chairperson of the Unity Club told Xinhua that Rwandan Women have been promoted and are now at a level where they can effectively contribute to the country's progress.

"We understand that we have to celebrate our achievements but must also achieve remaining development goals. We have to continue the fight against women because we have been receiving various cases where husbands brutally torture their wives," she noted.

According to the latest statistics from the Rwanda Police, anti- GBV and child protection directorate, a total of 3,127 cases of defilement were registered between 2012 and 2013 in the country. At least 325 cases of rape were also recorded in the same period.

Four Kenyan Cabinet Ministers quit over corruption allegations

Source: Lusaka Times

By Wagaki Marion

Nairobi, 28 March 2015 - Four Cabinet Ministers have resigned from President Uhuru Kenyatta's government following his demand that they must quit after the Ethics, Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) placed them on the list of senior officials under investigations.

The four, Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Cabinet Secretary Felix Koskei, Energy and Petroleum Cabinet Secretary Davis ChirChir, Transport CS Michael Kamau and Labour Cabinet Secretary Kazungu Kambi have today [Saturday, 28 March 2015] made history by voluntarily stepping down to pave way for investigations into corruption allegations against them.

Cabinet Ministers in the East African nation are referred to as Cabinet Secretaries.

The four bowed to pressure after calls of their resignation from different quotas came into the fore following their mention by the Ethics Anti-Corruption Commission report which was handed to President Kenyatta last week.

Their resignation came on the backdrop of mounting pressure after the Head of State on Thursday last week addressed the Nation where he said "all officers holding dockets in his government and mentioned in the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) report should relinquish their positions."

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Speaking at his office in Kilimo house Nairobi, Agriculture CS Koskei however said that he does not know the accusations against him, adding that he is ready to cooperate with the Ethics and Anti- Corruption Commission in the investigations.

“Even as I step aside today, I maintain that I have never been involved in any of the allegations against me,” he said while announcing his resignation.

The CS said that he had not been questioned by EACC but decided to step aside after his name featured on the Anti-graft watch dog report.

“It is the role of every Kenyan to respect the rule of law and uphold the spirit of constitutionalism and as leaders we have to lead by example,” he said.

Koskei maintained that he was innocent and asked the anti-graft watch dog to hasten investigations into the alleged corruption claims.

“I have said, I expect to be cleared. I am stepping aside for investigations to take place,” added Koskei. He said he will go to the anti-graft body on Monday 30th March to find out the specific allegations against him.

Koskei was heading one of the biggest Cabinet dockets in government and is known to be among intellectuals who form the Deputy President William Ruto inner circle think-tanks.

The Agriculture Minister was the first public official to resign after President Uhuru’s directive that all public officials mentioned in graft claims step aside to allow investigations.

Another Cabinet Secretary in the Energy and Petroleum Ministry Davis ChirChir followed suit and stepped down

Addressing the press this afternoon outside Nyayo House office, Davis Chirchir confirmed that he had communicated with the President to inform about his decision to stand aside after his name was mentioned and submitted to parliament.

State House spokesperson Manoah Esipisus confirmed this morning during a separate press conference that the officials who resigned were on the list.

“In a public office, one must be worthy of the trust of those who place their trust in them. Accountability and Integrity is paramount. It is therefore important for me to heed the call made by the President and to generally allay concerns by Kenya and step aside from the office”, ChirChir said.

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“I have appeared before EACC before this and made my statement and I am willing and available and ready to make any clarifications if called upon”, he said adding that he is confident that he will be vindicated of all the allegations as he had said on February 20 2015 when he appealed before EACC.

However, the CS noted that with the gains he has made during his docket as the energy and petroleum CS could be overshadowed by perceptions of corruption which have currently been trending in the media.

At the same time, Cabinet Secretary for Transport Engineer Michael Kamau and Labour Cabinet Secretary have also stepped down paving way for investigations after being named in the EACC report.

They told members of the press at yet another press conference at their respective offices that they were certain that once the investigations are complete, they would be clean to serve the country in the same capacity. They also supported the president on the fight against corruption.

The full report of the EACC is expected to be tabled in Parliament [this] week on Tuesday 31st March

Kenya arrests 3 women over terrorism links

Source: Xinhua

Mombasa, 29 March 29 - Kenyan authorities confirmed on Sunday they are holding three women suspected to be suicide bombers in the coastal city of Mombasa.

Mombasa County Commissioner Nelson Marwa said the three were arrested in Elwak town on the Kenya-Somalia border as they attempted to sneak into Somalia to join Al-Qaida allied Somalia militants.

"They boarded a bus from Mombasa and were to travel to Somalia via Mandera while in Somalia they were to become jihadist brides while others were supposed to be trained as suicide bombers," Marwa told journalists in Mombasa.

Marwa said the three suspects are two Kenyan and one Tanzanian and all are university students below 21 years old.

The three, 19-year-old Ummul-Khayr Sadir Abdull from Zanzibar who is believed to be the team leader, Maryam Said Aboud and Khadija Abubakar Abdulkadir, will be arraigned in court on Monday.

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According to police sources, the three were lured to join the Al-Shabaab terror group through the social media.

Marwa said they are pursuing the main financiers of terrorism activities targeting mainly youth who end up joining the Al- Shabaab group to carry out more attacks in the country.

Senior anti-terror police officer said they are on higher alert over possible grenade and gun attacks in the coastal city.

Western nations have issued travel advisories to their nationals to avoid traveling in some parts of the coastal region and some parts of Nairobi and northern region near the border with Somalia.

The security forces said Al-Shabaab members who include Kenyans from Mombasa, Lamu, Kwale and Malindi are now back following the defeat of the group by Kenya Defence Forces (KDF).

The militants are believed to be behind Wednesday's murder of Criminal Investigation officer Mohamed Ibrahim Khamis in Old town. At least 56 youth have been arrested following the killing of the officer. There are also intelligence reports that Somalia militants Al- Shabaab returnees who have sneaked into the country from Somalia are planning attacks to avenge the killing of the group's external operations leader Aden Garar.

Uganda police hunt terror suspect planning attacks on foreigners

Source: AFP

Kampala, 27 March 2015 - Police in Uganda on Friday said they were hunting a terrorist suspect they believe is linked to Somalia's Shebab militants and was planning an "imminent" attack in the capital Kampala.

Police spokesperson Fred Enanga said the suspect, who remains at large, had plotted to attack places popular with foreigners.

"From intelligence, they were actually targeting public places patronised by basically the whites, like some of the shopping malls," said Enanga.

"The intelligence was also talking about parks and markets within the city centre," he said.

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Enanga said the suspect was "very most likely linked" to Somalia's Shebab, an al-Qaeda affiliate responsible for double suicide bombings that killed at least 76 people in Kampala in 2010.

The United States embassy in Uganda had on Wednesday issued an emergency terror warning to its nationals.

"The US Embassy has received information of possible terrorist threats to locations where Westerners, including US citizens, congregate in Kampala, and that an attack may take place soon," the embassy said.

A similar warning was issued by the US in September, after which Ugandan security forces seized suicide vests and explosives during a raid on a suspected Shebab cell in Kampala.

Uganda is a key contributor to the African Union's AMISOM force battling the Shebab inside Somalia, making the country a target.

Police on Friday said the single suspect had already entered the country and was being sought.

"We have the name and particulars, we are working on the identity," said Enanga.

Police chief Kale Kayihura said the threat had been "imminent".

"The threat was very specific, the attack was supposed to happen yesterday," he told reporters at a press conference at police headquarters.

Kayihura said Uganda has "foiled" numerous plots since the deadly 2010 attacks.

"There have been very many attempts, we've defeated them," he said.

Uganda is safe and best place to visit, says tourism board

Source: New Vision (Kampala)

By David Mugabe

The tourism and business community have described travel advisory issued Wednesday citing terrorist threats as counterproductive to the country and the global travel industry.

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27 March 2015 - In a press interview Uganda Tourism Board chief executive Stephen Asiimwe franked by Amos Wekesa protested both the advisory saying that such information is detrimental to the country's economy.

"Terrorism is global, this is not a Ugandan issue, we have been victims but it should not be the responsibility of a foreign country (like U.S. and U.K.) to splash negative messages about us. The world is run by perceptions not facts and the advisory will affect many businesses like: tourism, hotels, transport, even British Airways and KLM will be hurt because everybody who has booked will cancel," lamented Asiimwe.

Hours after the UK, US advisory to their citizens about an imminent attack on Kampala, Uganda Police boss Gen Kale Kayihura yesterday [Thursday, 26 March] said, "police together with sister agencies have taken measures to ensure security and safety of the city and the country against this and other terror plans. I have no doubt that with the vigilance of the public and the time tested effectiveness of our security forces we shall defeat them again."

By close of business yesterday [26 March], the private sector were also coalescing to meet under the Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU) to engage the U.S. and U.K. government over what they consider a stereotype and patronizing attitude that hurts businesses and continues to deny the country the opportunity to create jobs for its citizenry.

Amos Wekesa, tourism investor and UTB board member urged the Ugandan citizenry to develop a more positive outlook for their country.

"Those countries that have grown have citizens who are proactive and look at their strength and sell it to the world," said Wekesa.

David Mugabe spoke to Stephen Asiimwe, CEO of UTB and Amos Wekesa, private investor on the negative advisory and why Uganda remains a top travel destination. Below are excerpts of the interview:

Stephen, despite the advisory why would a foreigner or tourist visit Uganda now?

This is the best time to come to Uganda. It is a safe and beautiful country, best weather and heritage. It is a place where you will have a lifetime experience because we have world class activities. Our tourism facilities and experiences are pristine, natural and not cluttered like other places. This is the best time to come, the dollar has appreciated and the traveller gets more value and experience when they come.

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We encourage people to come visit. It is a good place to do business and has good infrastructure and ICT. We have very many foreigners living in Uganda. Many students from all over Africa, at all levels of education, people don't just come for tourism, they come for business as well.

Amos, how many foreign tourists say U.S. and Europe are visiting Uganda?

Tourism is the fastest growing sector in Uganda at 21% per annum. We have moved from 200,000 in 2002 to 1.4m arrivals. European tourists to Uganda are now 120,000 with majority from the U.K. from 43,000 a few years ago. Germany is at 11,000. It is important to note that our American arrivals are also growing, we had National Football League (NFL) players, Forest Whittaker just recently. Uganda has got international accolades from CCN, Lonely Planet among others as the best destination.

Was the advisory by the U.S. about an eminent attack warranted?

We have a security system that operates 24 hours a day, they are well equipped. There is no reason why a travel advisory should be given by another country. We have put in place a tourism police. UTB takes very serious concern about the travel advisory without due recourse on its impact and implications. This is an unfortunate statement from our brothers. We implore and ask that this travel advisory be removed. Our security forces have been doing what they do best.

Amos, your take on the advisory

A Belgian T.V. did a survey on the safest cities in Africa and Kampala came top. If there is anything I can credit government for is putting together a formidable security force. We now export security to Somalia, South Sudan to ensure regional security.

But terrorism is real, we should be taking more vigilance, isn't it?

This is not a Ugandan issue, it is universal, for us we have been victims but it should not be the responsibility of foreign country to splash negative messages about us. The world is run by perceptions not facts and the advisory is a negative perception index. It will hurt British Airways, KLM because everybody who has booked will cancel. This advisory cuts across a value chain, for every tourist who cancels, 20 jobs are lost- craft sellers, internet, newspapers, fuel dealers, foods and beverages.

Amos, what about the negativity sometimes among the citizenry?

We all have a responsibility over our country Uganda. We should be able to understand that the more we are proud of Uganda and portray it the more the benefits for us all. Those countries that have grown have citizens who are proactive.

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Russia donates 67 trucks to support WFP operations in Africa

Source: Xinhua

Tororo (Uganda), 30 March 2015 - Russia on Tuesday donated 67 trucks to the UN World Food Program (WFP) to support its relief operations in East and Central Africa.

The vehicles are part of a Russian global contribution to WFP of 218 trucks, valued at 21 million U.S. dollars. They are accompanied by mobile workshops, technicians and an additional 1.6 million dollars to cover operational costs related to the trucks.

While receiving the trucks here in the eastern Ugandan district of Tororo, acting WFP Country Director Michael Dunford said the vehicles will assist in distributions and deliveries in Uganda and throughout the East and Central Africa region.

“WFP greatly appreciated the generosity of the Russian government for the contributions, which will enhance the WFP’s fleet capacity in the region,” Dunford said while receiving the trucks at the food agency’s regional warehouse here.

“As one of the world’s leading humanitarian organization, WFP needs to respond quickly to breaking emergencies to save lives and meet the needs of people affected by crisis,” Dunford added.

Radmir Gynanov, Russian ambassador to Uganda said that Russia is happy to offer a helping hand to people who are in need.

After the delivery of the 67 trucks, 53 of them were loaded with food aid and dispatched to South Sudan where over 4 million people have been affected by fighting in country. The rest will be stationed in Uganda.

Another 62 of the 218 trucks are expected to arrive later this year for use in the region and elsewhere in Africa.

Uganda media ordered to provide live coverage of all major events of President Yoweri Museveni

Source: AFP

28 March 2015 - Radio and television stations in Uganda were on Friday ordered to provide live coverage of major events involving the country's veteran President Yoweri Museveni, prompting protests by activists and the opposition.

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The Uganda Communications Commission, a state-controlled body, told local broadcasters they were subject to "licensing conditions issued by the commission, whereby all broadcast stations are expected to provide live coverage of major national events and addresses" by the president.

The directive, circulated to media on Friday and seen by AFP, said other events to be covered live included the "pronouncement of (a) national emergency or disaster, security threats or any event... that necessitates the entire public to have simultaneous access to the information."

The Commission said it will be "monitoring this coverage," and that "non-compliant stations will be penalised", without specifying the punishment.

Media rights activists said the order would be challenged.

Central African Republic: UNHCR strongly condemns the kidnapping of Congolese refugees by LRA rebels

Source: UNHCR

27 March 2015

This is a summary of what was said by UNHCR spokesperson Karin de Gruijl – to whom quoted text may be attributed – at the press briefing, on 27 March 2015, at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

UNHCR is strongly condemning the kidnapping of Congolese refugees by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), asking for an immediate release of those still in captivity.

Last Saturday (21 March), 15 Congolese refugees and one Congolese national were kidnapped by the LRA near the border between the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They were abducted from the DRC side of the border, where they had been tending to their fields. Thirteen of them, 2 women and 11 men, were released two days later and trekked back to the refugee camp near Zemio in the southeast of the Central African Republic. Some of the victims arrived with open wounds and a 16-year old girl had been raped. Three refugee boys are still missing.

Zemio refugee camp hosts some 3,400 Congolese refugees from the Ango Territory (Bas-Uele District), in Province Orientale in northeastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2009, they had fled LRA atrocities in the Province Orientale

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and found refuge in the Central African Republic. This week, however, they were once again victim of violence and torture.

Upon their arrival, the released refugees were immediately transferred to the health centre in Zemio where they are receiving the necessary medical care. They are still in shock and anxious to learn about the missing refugees. UNHCR and its partner International Medical Corps have put in place psychosocial counseling sessions to help them cope with this traumatic event.

We will also step up awareness raising efforts to provide refugees with up to date information about the security situation, any LRA activities in the region and the risks associated with moving back and forth across the border, between the camp in the Central African Republic and their fields in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Since the arrest in the Central African Republic of Dominic Ongwen, an LRA top commander accused of crimes against humanity in the beginning of this year, LRA rebels have intensified their attacks on villages at the CAR/DRC border. According to Catholic Relief Services, the LRA has committed over 25 abductions in the month of February in several villages in northeastern DRC, close to Zemio and the border.

The LRA sprung up in Uganda in 1986, established its first base in Sudan in 1993, and spread to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2005, before moving further north into the Central African Republic in 2009. Chased by the Ugandan armed forces, the remaining LRA rebels have pulled back their positions in the forests in southeastern Central African Republic. It continues to wreak havoc and spread terror in the region.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported an increase in LRA attacks in both the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2014. In particular, the number of abductions rose from 346 cases in 2013 to 566 cases in 2014.

More than 180,000 people remain internally displaced in LRA affected areas in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while LRA violence caused more than 30,000 people to flee to the different neighbouring countries (9,232 CAR refugees in the DRC; 3,388 DRC refugees in CAR; and 15,769 DRC refugees and 2,047 CAR refugees in South Sudan).

UNHCR and partners are providing assistance to refugees and are seeking durable solutions for them, including voluntary repatriation. To date some 640 refugees have registered to take part in the upcoming voluntary return programme that will be facilitated by UNHCR. The return programme is expected to start in the coming weeks,

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once the rehabilitation and extension of the airstrips in Zemio and Ango airstrips have been completed.

For more information on this topic, please contact:

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Sudan gov't, Darfur rebel commanders sign peace deal in Chad

Source: Sudan Tribune

Khartoum, 27 March 2015 - Sudanese government and a number of Darfur rebel commanders led by Mohamedain Ismail Bashar, a former operation commander of the Sudan Liberation Movement -Minni Minnawi, signed a peace agreement in the Chadian capital Ndjamena on Friday [27 March].

Bashar's group is composed of several dissident rebel commanders who on 7 October 2014 accused their leader of nepotism, corruption and illegal detention of some leading members. Two weeks later, Minnawi sacked four commander and accused them of treason and communication with the enemy.

The peace agreement was signed by the head of Darfur peace office Amin Hassan Omer, and Bashar, in presence of the Chadian foreign minister Moussa al-Faki, representing President Idris Debi who facilitated the deal.

The parties didn't release the text of the signed deal but Sudan Tribune learnt it is a security arrangements agreement negotiated on the basis of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD).

Omer welcomed the agreement and said that it was the first time that confidence building and cooperation between the two parties take place before the signing. He further called on the rebel groups to follow this example.

Bashar's group strength is estimated at around 400 combatants with 30 vehicles.

Former SLM-MM military spokesperson Adam Saleh Abakar, the group logistics officer Abdalla Tijani and former humanitarian official Adam Buy-Dad are among Bashar's group members.

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Several sources told [Sudan Tribune that the signatories were in relation with JEM-Sudan leader Bakheit Abdallah Abdel-Karim (Dabajo) who encouraged them to negotiate with the government.

Dabajo himself before to join JEM was part of the SLM-MM.

The African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) called Darfur rebel groups including SLM-MM and their political allies of the Sudan Call forces to meet with the government next Sunday to discuss procedures of the national dialogue process.

AU briefed on South Sudan situation

Source: Sudan Tribune

Addis Ababa, 28 March 2015 – The African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) was briefed on the situation in South Sudan and the status of the peace process at its 494th meeting held on 24 March in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, chair of the mediation team of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), briefed the council on the outstanding issues that led to the collapse of the talks between President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar.

In a communique released following the briefing which was also attended by representatives of the warring parties, the AU expressed deep concern at the prevailing situation in the Africa's youngest nation.

It said the ongoing violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement as fighting continued to escalate between the two warring parties was disheartening.

“Council expressed deep concern at the prevailing situation in South Sudan, characterized by fighting in recent weeks and a serious humanitarian situation,” it partly reads.

“Council, noting with utmost disappointment the failure of the South Sudanese parties to reach an agreement on the outstanding issues by the deadline of 5 March 2015, as set by IGAD, once again, appealed to the South Sudanese Parties to live-up to their commitments under the Agreement of Cessation of Hostilities and to display the required political will and sense of responsibility to bring to an end the untold suffering inflicted upon their people,” it adds.

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It said the African body reminded the warring parties of the threat of sanctions against those seen to be obstructing the peace process, noting the United Nations Security Council's resolution 2206 (2015) to this effect.

The statement however said the AU's peace and Security Council looked forward to the next steps envisaged by IGAD for the resumption of the negotiations.

IGAD said it was working on a new mechanism that would expand the mediation body.

An ad hoc committee to be composed of the heads of state and government of Algeria, Chad, Rwanda and South Africa will be formed to support IGAD, adding the committee may meet soon and elaborate its terms and reference.

UN chief appeals to defense chiefs for "unity and backing" on peacekeeping

Source: Xinhua News Service

United Nations (New York), 27 March 2015 - The first-ever United Nations Chiefs of Defense Conference was held here on Friday with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appealing to senior military officials for more contributions and political will to boost peacekeeping operation.

"Peacekeeping is a shared global responsibility that advances the world's common interests," Ban said in his remarks at the conference, calling for "more diverse and more quickly available contributions" from member states.

"It also includes additional 'boots on the ground' from developed countries with more technologically advanced militaries, " he noted.

"We need unity and backing," Ban said. "Effective performance demands broad consensus on why, where and how peacekeepers carry out their mandates."

The historic event brings together chiefs of defense and senior military officials from more than 100 member states to discuss issues central to UN peacekeeping as part of a wider process of engagement by the UN with member states to expand the peacekeeping partnership and promote effective and efficient implementation of mandates.

The conference continues throughout today, with Under-Secretary- General for Peacekeeping Operations, Herve Ladsous, and Atul Khare, Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, also speaking.

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Sun Jianguo, deputy chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army, also attended the event.

Ban told the gathered soldiers that threats to peacekeepers "are growing," with more deaths year on year now than ever before.

"Before 2000, there were four times when more than 100 peacekeepers lost their lives in a single year. Since then, we have suffered that tragic toll ten times. Consecutively, 10 times," he said.

After a moment of silence was marked for fallen peacekeepers, Ban said the role of peacekeeping was first and foremost to protect civilians from violence.

"They also support stabilization and the extension of state authority. They strengthen the rule of law. They address gender inequality. They protect human rights," he said.

In a dangerously complex global security landscape, marked by terrorism, organized crime, civil conflicts and even health crises, peacekeepers were being given increasingly challenging mandates by the Security Council.

According to UN figures, more than 130,000 military, police and civilian staff from around the world today serve in the UN's 16 peacekeeping operations.

"This is our largest deployment in history. It must be matched by a stronger international partnership for peacekeeping," Ban said, stressing that peacekeepers should be able to rapidly deploy into active conflicts that may escalate at any moment, with capacity to move peacekeepers quickly and safely to where they are most needed, and with intelligence capabilities and other support to enable them to fulfill their mandates.