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



MEDIA MONITORING

4 May 2015

D.R. CONGO

DR Congo grants amnesty to hundreds of M23 rebels

Source: AFP World News

Kinshasa, 30 April 2015 - The Democratic Republic of Congo announced Thursday it had granted amnesty to around 375 ex-members of the defeated M23 rebel movement.

The rebels' 18-month war, during which they briefly seized the key eastern DR Congo town of Goma, capital of the mineral-rich North Kivu province, was brought to an end in 2013 by government troops and UN peacekeepers.

Some 1,300 rebels fled to Uganda and others took refuge in Rwanda after their insurgency was crushed.

According to decrees from DR Congo's justice ministry read out on public television, the amnesty law covers "insurgent acts", "acts of war" as well as "political offences" and requires rebels to sign a promise not re-offend.

The amnesty does not include offences like crimes against humanity, war crimes, terrorism, torture, sexual violence, use or conscription of children, embezzlement of public funds and looting.

In February last year President Joseph Kabila announced the amnesty as part of the deal to end the conflict with the rebels.

The rebels complained in August that only 31 members of M23 had been granted amnesty out of the 3,657 people who had signed a pledge not to take up arms again.

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The insurgents also complained that "dozens" of their comrades were arrested after returning to DR Congo.

Of the ex-rebels benefitting from the amnesty about 30 were locked up in the Congolese capital Kinshasa, 220 others in Uganda, 122 in Rwanda and four others in Goma.

While the M23 rebels were defeated, numerous armed groups still operate in a region that has been in turmoil for the best part of the past two decades.

Much of the rebel activity consists of abuses against civilians and illegal exploitation of natural resources, be it metals, ivory or timber.

Vers la délimitation de la frontière terrestre entre Rwanda et RDC

Source: RFI

En fin de semaine, les experts rwandais et congolais ont fini de localiser sur le terrain l'emplacement des 22 bornes qui démarquent la frontière telle que définie en 1911 par les colonisateurs belges et allemands. Prochaine étape désormais : reconstruire ces bornes.

3 mai 2015 - Sur une trentaine de kilomètres à vol d'oiseau, les experts rwando-congolais ont passé dix jours à retrouver et marquer sur le terrain l'emplacement des fameuses bornes.

Ces 22 bornes séparent le Rwanda de la République démocratique du Congo sur un tracé allant de la ville de Goma jusqu'au mont Ehu. Une zone où les incidents frontaliers ont été fréquents ces derniers mois, il y a dix jours encore.

Résultat, pour Rachidi Tumbula, l'un des experts de cette commission mixte, il est urgent de terminer ce travail commencé en 2009: « Il faut vider les prétextes de conflits. Parce que, aujourd'hui, à chaque fois qu'il y a des conflits, les gens de la commission de vérification de la CIRGL interviennent. Mais eux-mêmes ne connaissent pas non plus où se trouvent les frontières. Donc il faudrait qu'il y ait une commission comme la nôtre pour dire 'c'est ici la frontière acceptée par nous tous'. Et que si quelqu'un traverse, qu'ils soient capables de dire : 'vous, vous avez traversé...' ».

Au final, aucune perte de territoire pour l'un ou l'autre pays, insistent les experts, mais des ajustements. A l'emplacement de la deuxième borne, par exemple, une maison rwandaise. Mais à la borne 3, 4, 5 et 6, ce sont des Congolais qui ont construit leur domicile et empiètent sur la frontière.

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Or l'idée est de recréer une zone neutre de 12 mètres entre les deux pays. Faut-il détruire ou déplacer ces maisons ? Ces ajustements vont être adoptés dans les prochains jours, car les présidents de la commission frontalière rwandaise et congolaise sont attendus à Goma mardi pour adopter le rapport final des experts.

Une fois les ajustements adoptés, restera ensuite à reconstruire l'ensemble des 22 bornes. Mais le plus dur reste à faire : délimiter la frontière liquide, celle qui traverse le lac Kivu, riche de ressources notamment gazières. Et pour cela, aucun calendrier n'est prévu.

Congo : Le port du voile intégral interdit dans les milieux publics

Source: Le Griot.info (quotidien panafricain d'informations générales)

Le port du voile intégral par les femmes musulmanes en milieux publics est désormais interdit au Congo. La décision a été prise par les autorités congolaises, pour « pour prévenir tout acte de terrorisme et d'insécurité », a indiqué le ministère congolais de l'Intérieur, dans une notification adressée entre autres au Conseil supérieur islamique du Congo.

4 mai 2015 - Ainsi, les femmes musulmanes ne peuvent désormais arborer leur voile intégral qu'à la maison, dans les lieux de culte mais pas dans les milieux publics. Les autorités congolaises ont également interdit aux musulmans venant d'autres pays de passer leurs nuits dans les mosquées. En effet, des milliers de personnes – principalement des musulmans – ont fui la violence de la Centrafrique voisine et ont trouvé refuge dans les mosquées au Congo.

Ces décisions prises par les autorités congolaises, semblent plutôt avoir été bien accueillies par la communauté musulmane. D'ailleurs pour El Hadj Abdoulaye Djibril Bopaka président du Conseil supérieur islamique du Congo, « La décision de l'autorité est bonne parce qu'il y a eu des témoignages selon lesquels des non musulmans se cachaient derrière le voile intégral pour commettre des actes inciviques », a-t-il indiqué.

Pays à 80% chrétiens, le Congo accueille sur son sol 90% de musulmans venus d'Afrique de l'Ouest et des pays arabes, selon les chiffres révélés par le Conseil supérieur islamique du Congo. Et, sur les 800 000 fidèles musulmans que compte le pays 10% sont des congolais.

Le Congo, est le premier dans la sous-région Afrique Centrale à avoir pris cette décision d'interdire le port de viol intégral dans les milieux publics. Le pays n'ayant pas

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encore été frappé par des actes terroristes, comme c'est le cas pour son plus proche voisin le Cameroun durement frappé par le groupe islamiste nigérian Boko Haram.

Russia: U.N. Security Council should stay out of Burundi dispute

Source: Reuters World Service; Reporting by Michelle Nichols; Editing by Ted Botha

Michelle Nichols

United Nations, 1 May 1, 2015 - Russia said on Friday the United Nations Security Council should not intervene in Burundi's constitutional dispute that has sparked the biggest political crisis in the East African state since an ethnically fuelled civil war ended in 2005.

Diplomats said Russia and China on Thursday blocked a French-drafted council statement on the situation in Burundi, where there has been almost a week of street protests over President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to seek a third term.

Russian U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told reporters, "it's not the business of the Security Council and the U.N. Charter to get involved in constitutional matters of sovereign states."

The Burundi constitution and the Arusha peace accord [...] limit the president to two terms, but Nkurunziza's supporters say he can run again because his first term, when he was picked by lawmakers, does not count.

The draft council statement, seen by Reuters, "stressed the need to hold a peaceful, credible, transparent and inclusive electoral process to sustain the gains of peace at a critical time, in accordance with the spirit of the Arusha Agreement, which led to over a decade of peace in Burundi, and with the rule of law."

It also expressed concern about the unrest and escalation of violence since the announcement of Nkurunziza's candidacy for the June 26 presidential vote and condemned the use of lethal weapons in response to the protests.

Statements by the 15-member U.N. Security Council have to be agreed to by consensus.

The crisis is being closely watched in a region still scarred by the 1994 genocide that killed more than 800,000 people in neighboring Rwanda, which like Burundi is divided between ethnic Tutsis and Hutus.

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"If some members of the council, some others, want to discuss with people in Burundi how they should interpret their own constitution, we would have no objection to that," Churkin said. "But the Security Council has nothing to do with constitutions in other countries."

The African Union's Peace and Security Council on Wednesday said both sides should await Burundi Constitutional Court's decision on his eligibility.

Nkurunziza warned on Friday of tough measures against those staging protests. Hundreds of students from a university shuttered by the government sought refuge outside the U.S. embassy in the capital Bujumbura on Friday.

The United Nations says about 26,000 Burundians have fled to Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo in the last month.

BURUNDI

Hundreds of students seek refuge outside U.S. embassy in Burundi

Source: Reuters World Service

By Edmund Blair; Writing by Drazen Jorgic; Editing by Dominic Evans

Bujumbura, 1 May 2015 - Hundreds of students from a Burundi university shuttered by the government were seeking refuge outside the U.S. embassy in the capital on Friday, amid unrest and escalating tensions ahead of the June 26 presidential vote.

The east African nation has been rocked by days of protests triggered by President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to seek a third term, a move opponents say violates the constitution and a peace deal that ended an ethnically charged civil war in 2005.

Citing security fears, the government on Wednesday closed University of Burundi, a prestigious institution where football-fanatic Nkurunziza taught physical education in the mid-1990s. Students said they left halls on Thursday but those from rural areas were unable to return home due to road blocks.

An official at the U.S. embassy in Bujumbura said late on Thursday that hundreds of students were "seeking a safe refuge" and had lined the street next to the embassy compound. A witness said they were still there on Friday but did not give numbers.

The embassy spokesman had no immediate comment.

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Tom Malinowski, U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor told Nkurunziza in a meeting on Thursday that the country risks "boiling over," especially if political space is closed for opponents.

"We have urged the government not to let the situation get past a point of no return, because if that happens the gains of the last decade really will be at risk," Malinowski told a news conference on Thursday, adding that there would be "consequences" if violence continues or gets out of hand.

Bujumbura suburbs, where five consecutive days of protests had taken place since Sunday, were generally calmer on Friday, a national Labor Day holiday.

The crisis is being closely watched in a region still scarred by the 1994 genocide that killed more than 800,000 people in neighboring Rwanda, which like Burundi is divided between ethnic Tutsis and Hutus.

Burundi's electoral commission on Friday started accepting applications to stand for president, but it was not immediately clear if any opposition figures have submitted their bids. They have until May 9 to do so.

Diplomats say independent candidate Agathon Rwasa, who like Nkurunziza is a former Hutu rebel commander turned politician, stands the best chance of challenging the president.

Rwasa has trodden a cautious path during the protests that erupted on Monday, criticizing the government's heavy-handed tactics and defending people's right to rally, but refraining from calling for mass protests.

Analysts say Rwasa does not wish to give the government, who term the protests an "insurrection" and illegal, a justification to detain him and exclude him from running for presidency.

The constitution and the Arusha peace accord limit the president to two terms in office, but Nkurunziza's supporters say he can run again because his first term, when he was picked by lawmakers and not elected, does not count.

Three killed, including two policemen, in Burundi attack: police

Source: AFP World News

Bujumbura, 2 May, 2015 - Three people, including two policemen, were killed and several people wounded Friday in a grenade attack in the capital of Burundi, which has

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been rocked by protests at the president's bid to seek a third term in office, police and witnesses said.

The deaths came in an attack in the Kamenge district of Bujumbura.

Police director general General Andre Ndayambaje told AFP two officers were killed and one was wounded, while a local resident said a civilian also lost his life and two others were wounded.

A similar attack in the centre of the capital of the small central African nation wounded three policemen, the general said.

A senior police officer, who requested anonymity, said police patrolling on foot in Kamenge were attacked with a grenade and a police vehicle was also hit with a grenade.

The local resident said the grenade attack was followed by automatic gunfire.

One policeman died on the spot and another was wounded in the legs, he said.

Minutes later, a grenade exploded under the car of the local police chief who had arrived on the scene. He got out but was killed by a shot.

According to the resident, a civilian was also killed in the shooting and a woman and a child wounded by the second grenade.

A reporter at the scene saw two small craters a few hundred metres (yards) apart and traces of fresh blood in the vicinity.

Seven dead, 66 hurt in week of Burundi protests: officials

Source: AFP World News

Bujumbura, 1 May 1 2015 - At least seven people have died and 66 others been wounded in nearly a week of clashes between police and protestors in the central African nation of Burundi, officials said Friday.

Giving an overall toll of those injured in the violence, Burundian Red Cross spokesman Alexis Manirakiza said 29 people were hurt in Thursday's clashes, bringing to 66 the number of wounded since the violence began on Sunday.

Sporadic clashes continued in parts of the capital Bujumbura on Friday, witnesses said.

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The unrest broke out after the ruling CNDD-FDD party designated President Pierre Nkurunziza as its candidate in the next presidential election, which is due to be held in the small central African nation on June 26.

Opposition figures and rights groups say that Nkurunziza's attempt to stand for a third consecutive term goes against the constitution as well as a peace deal that ended a civil war in 2006.

Medical sources said many of those hurt in the clashes has suffered gunshot wounds, allegedly at the hands of police who have fired into crowds with live ammunition.

Red Cross and medical sources said three people were killed on the first day of protests, and three later that night in an alleged attack by ruling party militia forces. A soldier was also shot dead on Thursday when an intelligence officer opened fire near a barricade erected by protesters.

Nkurunziza, a former rebel leader and born-again Christian from the Hutu majority, has been in power for two terms since 2005.

His supporters say he is eligible to run again, since his first term in office followed his election by parliament -- not directly by the people as the constitution specifies.

PRESS BRIEFING BY THE INFORMATION SERVICE

Source: UN

Ahmad Fawzi, Director a.i. of the UN Information Service in Geneva, chaired the briefing. The Spokespersons for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the International Federation of the Red Cross, the United Nations Refugee Agency and the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, participated.

Burundi

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that the OHCHR was deeply concerned about the series of measures taken this week by Burundian authorities to seriously curtail the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful expression and assembly.

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The reported use of live ammunition by intelligence and security forces during protests was particularly alarming and the OHCHR urged the authorities to ensure that international standards, including the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, were fully respected.

Hundreds of people had been detained since the demonstrations had begun on 26 April. According to one credible report, over 400 individuals were being held in extremely overcrowded conditions, with detainees having to sleep standing up. Detainees had also been beaten, particularly on their feet and buttocks, with some of those released having trouble walking due to the beating.

With the electoral campaign due to officially begin in just nine days, the OHCHR was calling on the authorities to ensure the space necessary for the conduct of free and fair elections. Restricting independent coverage by closing radio stations, curbing live coverage of protests and curbing the use of social media would not succeed in quashing dissent. Freedom of expression and the right to information had to be protected.

As the High Commissioner had stressed during his visit to Burundi just two weeks earlier, “Criticism is a vital element of democracy, not a threat that must be crushed. The right to freedom of expression and opinion is enshrined in international treaties ratified by Burundi, and the Government is obliged to uphold those treaties.”

On whether Burundi was at the danger of descending into civil war, Mr. Colville said that the early warning statement by the High Commissioner a few weeks before had been issued with exactly that in mind. Refugee movements had already been taking place. Ethnic element had not been the issue at the time of the High Commissioner’s visit.

The numbers of persons killed stood at least six persons, and one soldier shot dead, according to the local Red Cross.

OHCHR had not addressed the issue of limits of presidential terms. The Arusha Agreement had specified two terms, whereas the Constitution was a bit more ambiguous.

Mr. Boulierac stated that UNICEF was preoccupied by the situation in Burundi, where children might become victims of the confrontations both in and around Bujumbura. He informed on violations of children's rights since the protests had begun in and around Bujumbura on 26 April, with children drawn into protests, detained and wounded physically, as well as the case of a child killed.

Mr. Boulierac reminded that Burundian and international laws clearly established the obligation to respect the rights of children and protect them against violence.

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Government forces and Burundian security should ensure that children were taken out of any movement that put them at risk and threatened their physical integrity. UNICEF was coordinating with the OHCHR verification visits to prisons in Bujumbura, and was auditing the number of schools that had closed because of insecurity in the municipalities of Bujumbura. Among the thousands of people who had crossed borders to Rwanda there were many children. UNICEF was supporting the response primarily in water and Sanitation, Early childhood, Child protection and Nutrition. However, the exponential growth in the numbers of refugees required additional resources to quickly scale up the response and ensure readiness for additional new arrivals.

Babar Baloch, for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), said that the latest updated figures for Burundians fleeing the country stood at over 26,000. Over 21,000 had gone to Rwanda, 4,000 to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the rest to Tanzania.

Mr. Fawzi would subsequently provide more information on the Secretary-General's Special Envoy visit to Burundi.

Burundi president warns of "severe sanctions" against protesters

Source: Reuters World Service

By Edmund Blair and Patrick Nduwimana; Additional reporting by Tom Miles in Geneva; Writing by Drazen Jorgic; Editing by Dominic Evans

Bujumbura, 1 May 2015 - Burundi President Pierre Nkurunziza warned on Friday of tough measures against those staging protests against his decision to seek a third term, a move opponents say violates the constitution and endangers a peace deal.

Chanting anti-Nkurunziza songs and blocking a road with boulders, hundreds of protesters gathered in Bujumbura's southern suburb of Musaga on Friday, the sixth day of protests. Unlike previous days, there were no scuffles with police.

Urging protesters to stay off the streets, Nkurunziza said the demonstrations were illegal and announced a new judiciary commission would investigate the "insurrectional movement."

"Within one month, the commission will issue its report, severe sanctions will be taken against those who will be found guilty," Nkurunziza said in Labor Day message broadcast on Friday but recorded on Thursday.

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The protests have sparked the biggest political crisis since an ethnically-fueled civil war ended in 2005.

The U.N. said it was alarmed by reports intelligence and security agencies had used live ammunition during protests. It added that one credible report suggested more than 400 people have been arrested and held in overcrowded conditions.

"Detainees have also been beaten, particularly on their feet and buttocks, with some of those released having trouble walking due to the beating," said U.N. human rights spokesman Rupert Colville, citing the report.

The government could not be immediately reached to comment.

More than 600 students have sought refuge at the U.S. embassy after the government, citing security fears, closed the University of Burundi on Wednesday. Nkurunziza taught physical education at the university in the mid-1990s.

"We are here for security because we have been chased from the campuses," said Donation, a student who did not wish to give his surname.

The protesters in Bujumbura suburbs have vowed to continue demonstrating ahead of the June 26 elections.

"We want to tell President Nkurunziza that we are not giving up. We will continue to demonstrate until he abandons his ambition to run for a third term," a protester in the Musaga district area told Reuters.

The crisis is being closely watched in a region still scarred by the 1994 genocide that killed more than 800,000 people in neighboring Rwanda, which like Burundi is divided between ethnic Tutsis and Hutus.

The United Nations says about 26,000 Burundians have fled to Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo in the last month.

Tom Malinowski, U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor told Nkurunziza on Thursday that Burundi risks "boiling over," especially if political space is closed for opponents, adding there would be "consequences" if violence continued.

Burundi's electoral commission on Friday started accepting applications to stand for president, but it was not immediately clear if any opposition figures have submitted bids. They have until May 9 to do so.

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The constitution and the Arusha peace accord limit the president to two terms in office, but Nkurunziza's supporters say he can run again because his first term, when he was picked by lawmakers and not elected, does not count.

UN slams Burundi crackdown on pre-poll protests

Source: AFP World News

Geneva, 1 May 2015 - The UN voiced alarm Friday over a deadly crackdown on protests in Burundi this week ahead of June elections, warning that freedom of expression in the country was seriously under threat.

"We are deeply concerned about the series of measures taken this week by Burundian authorities to seriously curtail the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful expression and assembly," Rupert Colville, spokesman for the UN human rights office, told reporters in Geneva Friday.

At least seven people have died and 66 others have been wounded in nearly a week of clashes between police and protestors ahead of upcoming elections in the central African nation, according to officials.

The unrest broke out after the ruling CNDD-FDD party last weekend designated President Pierre Nkurunziza as its candidate in the next presidential election, which is due to be held in the small central African nation on June 26.

Opposition figures and rights groups say that Nkurunziza's attempt to stand for a third consecutive term violates the constitution as well as a peace deal that ended a civil war in 2006.

Medical sources said many of those hurt in the clashes suffered gunshot wounds, allegedly at the hands of police who fired into crowds with live ammunition.

"The reported use of live ammunition by intelligence and security forces during protests is particularly alarming and we urge the authorities to ensure that international standards... are fully respected," Colville said.

He pointed out that hundreds of people had been detained since the demonstrations began Sunday.

"According to one credible report, over 400 individuals are being held in extremely overcrowded conditions, with detainees having to sleep standing up," he said.

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"Detainees have also been beaten, particularly on their feet and buttocks, with some of those released having trouble walking due to the beating," he added.

Colville stressed that with the electoral campaign due to officially begin in just nine days, "we call on the authorities to ensure the space necessary for the conduct of free and fair elections."

"Restricting independent coverage by closing radio stations, curbing live coverage of protests and curbing the use of social media will not succeed in quashing dissent," he said, insisting: "freedom of expression and the right to information must be protected."

UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, who visited Burundi just two weeks ago, had warned the country's authorities that "criticism is a vital element of democracy, not a threat that must be crushed," Colville pointed out.

Zeid has also cautioned that the country is at a "crossroads" between a fair vote and a return to its "horrendously violent past".

What you need to know about the crisis in Burundi

Source: The Daily Vox (<http://www.thedailyvox.co.za/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-crisis-in-burundi/>) - South Africa

Burundi is on the brink of a political crisis and violence is spilling out onto the streets of the capital, Bujumbura. There are fears that a civil war could break out and lead to regional unrest. MUHAMMED ISMAIL BULBULIA outlines five things you need to know about Burundi right now.

4 May 2015

1. The current crisis is only the last link in a chain of catastrophes

Living in the shadow of a 12-year civil war spurred on by ethnic conflicts between majority Hutus and minority Tutsis, most Burundians are tired of violence and unrest and are loathe to see another violent chapter in their country's fratricidal history.

The civil war ended in 2005 with the drawing up of a constitution and the election of former rebel leader Pierre Nkurunziza. Although the president has overseen a period of impressive stability during his two terms, his ruling party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), has worked to tighten its grip on power through violence. A group consisting partly of former civil war combatants, known as the Imbonerakure, has been linked to the killing of

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Nkurunziza's opponents with its role expanding as his campaign for a third term began to mobilise.

2. The crisis was ignited by the president's unconstitutional decision to run for a third term

The announcement that Nkurunziza would seek a third term in this year's June elections has been deemed a violation of the two-term limit set out in Burundi's constitution, as well as the 2000 Arusha peace agreement, which was credited as containing Burundi's ethnic rifts and serving as a basis for the constitution. Activists have taken to the streets to protest the decision and opposition leader Agathon Rwasa called on Nkurunziza to abandon a third term to "prevent the country from massive violence and killings". The president's supporters meanwhile maintain that his first term does not count as he was picked by lawmakers and not democratically elected.

3. Violent protest has been met with violent police reactions

Hundreds of frustrated protestors have taken to the streets in recent days, chanting slogans and waving placards and, according to some reports, hurling stones at police and burning tyres to block roads, to voice their dissent. Police have responded by using tear gas and water cannons against the protestors. According to the Red Cross, hundreds of people have been arrested and at least six protestors having been killed so far.

4. The government doesn't want foreign intervention

Western nations and regional African countries have pushed Nkurunziza not to seek a third term, but Nkurunziza's government has requested that diplomats and foreign organisations "observe diplomatic neutrality". The US and EU have warned that they would take steps against any individuals who stoke violence in the country. UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, meanwhile, sent the UN special envoy for the Great Lakes region to Burundi for talks with Nkurunziza and the opposition amid fears of yet another civil war.

5. There are fears the conflict could reignite a civil war and spill over into surrounding countries

Living in the shadow of a civil war that ceased only 10 years ago, thousands of Burundian civilians have already fled the country, with 20,000 seeking refuge in neighbouring Rwanda and 4,000 escaping to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Burundi and Rwanda have historically been destabilised by cross-border unrest due to their proximity, shared colonial history and similar social and ethnic structures. Should the current situation in Burundi devolve into a full-scale war, anti-Rwanda elements in

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the region could side with pro-Nkurunziza forces. Eventually, other regional forces could be dragged into a conflict.

UN Warns Burundi Could Descend Into Chaos

Source: VOA

By Lisa Schlein

1 May 2015 - UN aid agencies warn the growing standoff between protesters and the Burundian government over upcoming presidential elections may result in the country descending into chaos and possibly civil war.

The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights said it's worried about increasingly repressive measures being taken by Burundi's government to stifle political dissent. Spokesman Rupert Colville pointed to a series of actions taken by authorities which he said seriously curtail people's rights to freedom of peaceful expression and assembly.

"Hundreds of people have also allegedly been detained since the demonstrations began last Sunday," he said. "And according to one credible report, over 400 individuals are being held in extremely overcrowded conditions, with detainees actually having to sleep standing up, it is so crowded.

"Detainees have also been beaten allegedly particularly on their feet and buttocks. And some of those who have been released have had trouble walking as a result of those beatings."

The International Red Cross reports at least six people have been killed in demonstrations following President Pierre Nkurunziza's announcement last week that he plans to run for another term. Opponents say this is unconstitutional and violates the 2000 Arusha agreement, which limits presidents in Burundi to two terms.

Colville said High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, at the end of his visit to Burundi a couple of weeks ago, essentially issued an early warning about the dangers of enflaming tensions as the elections approach. He told VOA the high commissioner was particularly concerned about the militia wing of the ruling party's Imbonerakure youth group.

"The activities of that militia have been leading, according to refugees in Rwanda, arriving in Rwanda, one of the principal reasons why they have been fleeing across the border," Colville said. "So, you already have got a refugee movement taking place. You

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have got a country with a terrible history... At the time we were there anyway the ethnic element was not really an issue. But, one does not have to be a rocket scientist to say it could come once again and that would be too awful for words.”

More than 300,000 people died in Burundi’s decade-long civil war between 1995 and 2005.

The latest update by the UN refugee agency finds more than 26,000 people have fled Burundi because of violence linked to the elections. It said Rwanda is hosting more than 21,000 refugees and thousands of others are heading for Tanzania and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Burundi's army declares its neutrality in crisis

Source: AFP

Bujumbura, 3 May 2015 - Burundi's defence minister declared the army's neutrality Saturday in the political crisis gripping the central African country, and called for an end to attacks on citizens' rights.

General Pontien Gacyubwenge made the call only hours after the security minister, General Gabriel Nizigama, announced a major crackdown after a week of protests by opposition and civil society groups.

General Gacyubwenge called on all sides to "avoid any kind of undignified behaviour which could plunge the country back into the dark past that it has lived through," a reference to the 13-year civil war between the Tutsi-controlled army and Hutu rebels that ended in 2006.

UGANDA

Ugandan team in Tanzania for extradition of top ADF rebel

By Mustafa Pazarlı

Source: <http://news.videonews.us/ugandan-team-tanzania-extradition-top-adf-rebel-028766.html>

Kampala, 2 May 2015 - The Ugandan government has sent a team of top police officers to Tanzania to negotiate the extradition of rebel leader Jamil Mukulu.

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“We have sent a team of officers to Tanzania to see how the government can help extradite the Allied Democratic Forces Rebel (ADF) leader,” Uganda police spokesman Fred Enanga told The Anadolu Agency.

He said Ugandan police had, through Interpol, contacted Tanzanian authorities requesting proof as to whether Mukulu had been arrested.

“In return, they asked us to send them Mukulu’s different photos under different facial expressions which we did,” said Enanga.

He is confident the person the Tanzanian officials have in their custody is Mukulu.

According to police, Mukulu is wanted on several counts of terrorism; murder; child and women trafficking; and forceful recruitment of both women and children into rebel ranks.

“We want to extradite him so that we can arraign him before our courts,” Enanga told AA.

Neighboring Ugandan and Tanzania do not have an extradition treaty.

Mukulu, a convert to Islam, has been on the run since the 1990s.

He is wanted for attacks such as the 1998 Kicwamba massacre in which scores of sleeping students were burned to death in their dormitories in a town near the Congo border.

The ADF, which originally said it opposed what it called the marginalization of Ugandan Muslims, is also accused of launching deadly bomb blasts in capital Kampala in the late 1990s before a military operation forced the rebels to set up camp in eastern Congo.

The rebels have since largely been quiet, though they would stage sporadic attacks on towns in eastern Congo and against Congolese military units.

This year, Uganda authorities linked ADF them to several murders in the country.

A number of Islamic religious schools were also closed down on allegations children were being recruited to join the ADF.

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KENYA

Kenya: Kerry Visit Marks Re-Birth of U.S - Kenya Relations

Source: The Star

By Kazungu Katana

2 May 2015 - The visits to Kenya by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry May 3-4, and former U.S. President Bill Clinton May 7, mark the re-birth of U.S./Kenya relations which have thawed since the incoming of the Jubilee Alliance Government in 2013.

The Kerry visit in particular is the most significant in that it is paving the way for President Barack Obama's own visit to Kenya early this July to attend the Global Entrepreneurship Summit hosted by the United States and Kenya. Clinton's four-day private visit, on the other hand, is to assess projects funded by the Clinton Foundation and the Clinton Global Initiative in the areas of health, education and climate change.

Kerry's visit is significant in other ways. It shall rekindle U.S./Kenya relations which have been on the decline under the Jubilee Administration. This decline in bilateral relations was triggered by several factors, among them the remark by former U.S. Ambassador to Kenya and Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnny Carson that choices had consequences.

Carson's remark was in connection with the Uhuru/Ruto presidential candidacies and their links to the ICC cases at The Hague. The Jubilee Alliance read Carson's remark as an American conspiracy to deny the duo a chance to participate in the presidential elections. When the Jubilee Coalition won, they looked at the American Government with a suspicious eye, prompting the thaw in the bilateral relations.

The other factor which contributed to the slowing down of Kenya/U.S. relations has to do with the issuance of travel advisories on Kenya, which Kenyan officials have blamed for the decline of the tourism industry.

However, President Uhuru Kenyatta's recent visits to Washington in which he has had tete-a-tete discussion with President Barack Obama, have helped reverse these suspicions. President Kenyatta's acquittal from the ICC cases has also helped improve U.S./Kenya relations. Under US law, it would have been difficult--almost impossible--for a sitting president to have official engagement with an indicted person at The Hague. This was the stumbling block in officially engaging the Kenyan President with the Americans or the rest of the Western governments' leaders.

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But the thaw in US/Kenya relations did not begin with the Jubilee Alliance Government. Since independence in 1963, U.S./Kenya relations have had their share of ups and downs. The worst came in 1964 when the Jomo Kenyatta Government expelled the US envoy to Kenya John Atkins and banned his book, 'The Black and the Reds'.

More recently in the 1980s, U.S./Kenya relations slowed down over democratisation issues during the one-party regime of Retired President Daniel arap Moi. As Korwa Adar observed, the US/ Kenya relations turned sour in October 1990, when the US Congress introduced a conditionality clause on aid to Kenya that provided that economic and military support would be preconditioned upon a certification by the Kenyan President that the government was taking steps to charge and try or release all political prisoners, including any persons detained for political reasons; cease any physical abuse or mistreatment of prisoners; restore the independence of the judiciary; and restore freedoms of expression. The then US ambassador to Kenya, Smith Hempstone, also made no secret of the fact that the US Congress was intent on providing development assistance only to those countries that were liberalising their political systems and adopting market oriented reforms in their economies. These demands infuriated Moi and slowed down relations between the two countries. The matter was made worse by ambassador Hempstone's personal support for the pro-democracy movement; even though pressures from both domestic and external sources forced the Moi regime to embrace multiparty politics in 1991.

The Secretary of State shall meet with Government officials and discuss security co-operation, particularly in light of the recent tragic attack at the Garissa University College. The US and Kenya have been partners in the fight against terror and Washington has been instrumental in training and equipping Kenya's anti-terror police, and facilitating screening equipment for our international airports. Kerry's visit will also help raise Kenya's profile on the international community, after suffering a series of negative publicity due to insecurity. The country has been portrayed as unsafe to travel, and Kerry's visit is an opportunity for the Kenyan authorities to disprove this perception. Kerry's visit is also a huge psychological blow to al Shabaab who have perhaps thought that their frequent attacks on this country shall dissuade high-level official visits and isolate Kenya.

Kerry's two-day visit is loaded. He will meet Cabinet secretaries, business leaders, opposition politicians, humanitarian aid workers, and civil society. The State Department says Kerry's visit will focus on "our common goals, including accelerating economic growth, strengthening democratic institutions and improving regional security."

John Kerry's visit is coming at an interesting time in the history of U.S./Kenya relations and Kenya's own foreign policy. The Jubilee Government has increasingly been leaning

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toward China, other Asian countries and Middle Eastern countries, if only for economic reasons. The question is whether Kerry's visit and that of President Obama are meant to counter the Chinese influence in Kenya. It should be noted that Kenya and the US have had a long and deep-rooted history of bilateral relations shared in democratic values. The Chinese are here to do business; the Americans have been here not only to do business but also to support democratic values, good governance, rule of law and human rights. Here lies the difference. This also means that both the US and China as a rising global economic power have obligations to support Kenya in its development endeavors.

Kerry's visit therefore, should be an opportunity for both countries to re-examine and strengthen existing bilateral programs in the areas of trade, democracy, good governance, police and judicial reforms, and official corruption. Supporting Kenya to consolidate its democratisation goals should form part of the Kerry visit. A stable, democratic and prosperous Kenya should be Washington's goal. But this stability and prosperity of Kenya shall depend on good governance and the eradication of official corruption. It is in this context that if Washington wishes Kenya well, Kerry should engage Kenyan officials on these issues.

President Obama should not be remembered as the son whose father came from the Kenyan soil at Kogelo in Siaya; rather he should be remembered as the first African-American President with Kenyan roots whose development initiatives helped bring peace, stability and prosperity to Kenyans.

SOUTH SUDAN

S/Sudan oks participation of western countries in peace talks

Source: APA (<http://en.starafrica.com/news/ssudan-oks-participation-of-western-countries-in-peace-talks.html>)

2 May 2015 - South Sudan has accepted the participation of the Troika countries (US, UK and Norway), in the peace talks with the rebels led by Riek Machar, reports said on Saturday. The regional mediation of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has proposed the involvement of the western countries in the negotiations after both warring parties failed to achieve break through last March.

South Sudan's foreign affairs minister, Barnaba Marial Benjamin said that South Sudan will not refused the facilitation proposed by the international community.

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As government, we welcome participation of Troika countries, the Africa Union, the United Nations and other members of the international community.

We appreciate their role because we want this conflict to be resolved through peaceful dialogue, the minister said.

The IGAD mediation announced last week that the western countries will join the mediation of the South Sudan crisis despite the south Sudan government reservation.

Other African partners will be involved in the talks, as Algeria, Nigeria, Chad, South Africa and Rwanda will be engaged in the peace process representing north, western, central, southern and eastern African regions, respectively.

South Sudan government had refused the participation of the western countries in the negotiations following its adaptation of a draft resolution to impose sanction on South Sudan leaders after the collapse of the negotiations last March.

SUDAN

Le Soudan poursuit la mission de l'ONU pour meurtres de civils

Source: CRI online (<http://french.cri.cn/621/2015/05/04/562s431721.htm>)

4 mai 2015 - Après environ une semaine d'échange de communiqués entre le gouvernement du Soudan et la Mission conjointe des Nations unies et de l'Union africaine au Darfour (MINUAD), Khartoum a intenté une poursuite criminelle, accusant la mission de tuer des civils au Darfour.

Les autorités soudanaises ont récemment déclaré avoir décidé de porter plainte au criminel contre la MINUAD, que Khartoum a accusée d'avoir tué sept civils dans la localité de Kass dans l'Etat soudanais du Sud-Darfour, alors que la mission a affirmé avoir agi en légitime défense.

Face aux déclarations contradictoires concernant le fil des événements, des analystes affirment que les tensions montent entre les deux parties, ce qui ouvre la porte à toutes les possibilités.

Abdalla Hassan, un analyste politique soudanais, a confié à Xinhua que "la récente confrontation entre le Soudan et la MINUAD est survenue après une série d'événements et d'accusations lancées par Khartoum à l'endroit de la mission, en

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commençant par violation du mandat, viols, soutien aux manifestants anti-gouvernement et meurtres de civils".

"Toutes ces accusations indiquaient que la relation entre Khartoum et la MINUAD avait atteint un point de non-retour. Cela ouvre la porte à toutes les possibilités, à moins que les partenaires de la MINUAD, les Nations unies et l'Union africaine, n'aient réussi à s'entendre avec Khartoum", a-t-il noté.

Khartoum semble insister pour voir la MINUAD quitter le Darfour en utilisant une stratégie de sortie qu'il étudie avec les Nations unies et l'Union africaine.

Khartoum soutient avoir plusieurs raisons de revendiquer le départ de la mission, dont le fait que la MINUAD n'a pas accompli ses tâches et est devenue un fardeau pour le gouvernement soudanais.

Dans cette optique, Abdul-Karim Mahdi, un autre analyste politique soudanais, a confié à Xinhua que "depuis plus de huit ans, la MINUAD ne réussit pas à appliquer son mandat et n'a laissé aucune trace sur le terrain au Darfour".

M. Mahdi croit que les récentes accusations de meurtres de civils au Darfour constituent un important obstacle dans la relation entre la mission et le gouvernement soudanais.

"Dans de telles circonstances, le départ de la MINUAD du Darfour semble logique, mais ne sera pas facile compte tenu que la MINUAD est l'une des plus importantes missions de maintien de la paix dans le monde et son départ exigera des mesures prolongées et compliquées", a noté M. Mahdi.

La récente crise entre la mission et le gouvernement a éclaté la semaine dernière lorsque des Casques bleus de la MINUAD ont ouvert le feu contre un rassemblement tribal dans la région de Kass dans l'Etat soudanais du Sud-Darfour, affirmant que les troupes avaient été attaquées par des hommes armés, alors que Khartoum soutient que les membres de la tribu cherchaient du bétail volé.

De plus, la mission a réitéré dans un communiqué que ses Casques bleus avaient répondu à deux attaques d'hommes armés à Kass, au Sud-Darfour, à la fin du mois dernier.

"Dans les deux incidents, les troupes de la MINUAD ont riposté mais n'ont jamais initié de fusillade; elles ont seulement agi pour se protéger", a affirmé le représentant spécial conjoint adjoint de la MINUAD, Abiodun Bashua, dans le communiqué.

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La confrontation a pris de l'ampleur lorsque le secrétaire général de l'ONU Ban Ki-moon et la présidente de la commission de l'Union africaine Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma ont condamné l'attaque contre la MINUAD et ont exhorté le gouvernement soudanais à traduire ses auteurs en justice dès que possible.

Cependant, Khartoum a qualifié dans un communiqué la position de l'UN et de l'UA de tentative de camouflage du "crime haineux" commis par la MINUAD au Darfour.

La MINUAD est considérée comme la deuxième plus importante mission de maintien de la paix dans le monde, après la mission de l'ONU en République démocratique du Congo.

Elle est composée de plus de 20.000 membres provenant des secteurs militaire, policier et civil, et détenait un budget de 1,4 million de dollars américains en 2013.