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



MEDIA MONITORING

19 February 2015

German envoy says Africa should take lead in neutralizing Rwandan rebels

Source: Xinhua

Kigali, 18 February 2015 - The African Union should take the lead in bringing an end to the issue of Rwandan rebels, the FDLR and ensure peace and security in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), the German ambassador to Rwanda Peter Fahrenholtz said Tuesday.

Fahrenholtz spoke after a meeting with members of the Rwandan Parliament, in Kigali, where he accompanied seven visiting members of German Parliamentary group.

Fahrenholtz said the German government firmly believes that FDLR and other negative forces in DR Congo have to be dissolved, but it has to be done with cooperation from African governments.

"This is taking place in an African country -- we cannot come in as Europeans and violate the sovereignty and dignity of this continent.

We want to do this together with African leaders and African Union (AU)," Fahrenholtz said.

Two political leaders of the FDLR, Ignace Murwanashyaka and his deputy Straton Musoni are currently on trial in a German court over leading the FDLR.

The deadline given for the FDLR to voluntarily disarm or face military offensive expired on January 2.

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Fahrenholtz insisted that regardless of the delays to neutralize FDLR, the international community has a consensus and similar opinion that there has to be peace in Eastern DR Congo.

He noted that the UN mission in DR Congo, Monusco has never been in a better shape than they are in now.

The UN spends about 1.5 billion U.S. dollars on Monusco every year, of which Germany contributes about 100 million U.S. dollars.

The envoy insisted that the big budget is aimed at resolving insecurity problems in the Eastern DR Congo to create a lasting peace in the Great Lakes region.

"Rwanda has done very well is rebuilding itself. It is very important that this conflict has to end, so that the entire region builds itself like Rwanda has done," he said.

Fahrenholtz pointed out that for the international community to operate freely there must be cooperation and goodwill from the Kinshasa government too, in regard to the neutralization of FDLR.

We are in the 21st century, he said, African problems have to be solved by Africans-but we can come in and support in good will from our African partners and all stakeholders in the region, including the DR Congo government.

The German foreign minister is expected in Kinshasa Thursday before heading to Kigali on Friday to discuss FDLR issue among other things.

The German delegation which arrived in Rwanda on Saturday is in the country on a four-day official visit to deliberate on issues regarding

German-sponsored development projects in the country and matters regarding budget support and inter-parliamentary relations.

Monusco reported last week that it had halted support to Congolese troops for operations against the FDLR following a decision by Kinshasa to appoint Gen. Bruno Mandevu to head its army operation against the FDLR and Gen.

Fall Sikabwe as commander of the 34th military region, largely covering eastern DR Congo's North Kivu Province where the offensive would concentrate.

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UN Security Council stresses need for credible, peaceful elections in Burundi

Source: Xinhua

United Nations, 18 February 2015 - The UN Security Council on Wednesday stressed "the crucial need for a free, transparent, credible, inclusive and peaceful electoral process" in Burundi in 2015, saying that "the significant progress (in the country) is not reversed."

The 15-nation UN council, in a presidential statement issued after a meeting on Burundi, said, "The Security Council welcomes the significant progress made by Burundi since the adoption of the Arusha Agreement in 2000, notably in the restoration of security and stability in the country."

"The Security Council notes that there remain challenges to overcome to ensure that the significant progress is not reversed, especially in the context of the 2015 elections," the statement said. "The Security Council stresses, in this regard, the crucial need for a free, transparent, credible, inclusive and peaceful electoral process in 2015 and sustained attention to such a process."

UN to formally end support for DR Congo operation

Source: AFP via News24

19 February 2015 - New York -The UN is pulling its support for a Democratic Republic of Congo military operation against rebels after Kinshasa missed a deadline to sack two generals, a UN official said Saturday.

The UN's 20 000-strong MONUSCO force had been working with Congo's army on a plan to drive out the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebels from the east of the country.

The planned joint offensive reached an impasse when UN officials demanded that two leading generals accused of human rights violations be replaced as a condition for supporting the military action.

"The initial two-week period ... has expired," the official told AFP.

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"The next step is the dispatch of formal letters to the relevant Congolese authorities concerning the cessation of support," the official said.

The correspondence will be sent by the end of the week, the official said.

DR Congo's President Joseph Kabila's government this month rejected a UN ultimatum to replace the two generals who are on a UN "red" list of known human rights violators.

UN officials told Kinshasa to fire the two generals or forfeit MONUSCO's support for the operation.

The UN move was limited to the planned operation against the FDLR and did not affect other military campaigns against the many rebel groups that roam the eastern DR Congo.

The United Nations is pushing for the disarming of dozens of rebel and splinter groups after two decades of conflict in eastern DR Congo, much of it fueled by the lucrative trade in minerals.

Rwanda: FDLR - Is the Delayed Offensive an Inside Job?

Source: The New Times (Rwanda)

By Edwin Musoni

16 February 2015 - The United Nations announced on Saturday that it would not support the DR Congo military offensive against FDLR militia on the grounds that the Kinshasa administration had assigned the operation to two generals the world body says have questionable human rights records.

Gen. Bruno Mandevu was recently appointed to head the FARDC operation against the FDLR and Gen. Fall Sikabwe named commander of the 34th military region, largely covering eastern DR Congo's North Kivu Province where FDLR is concentrated.

The UN decision did not surprise many observers as an anonymous official had said as much earlier last week.

The latest development has put both DR Congo and the 20,000-strong UN Stabilisation Mission in DR Congo (Monusco) on the spot, with some observers saying that the tricks are likely to be an inside job aimed at delaying or intentionally ignoring the need for an offensive against a militia group that has terrorised the eastern parts of the vast central African country for two decades.

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The FDLR, a militia group composed of remnants responsible for the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, is accused of spreading genocide ideology in the region.

The group is accused of mass rape of women and children and other kinds of atrocities, including conscripting children into their ranks.

It is a month and a half past the deadline given for the FDLR to voluntarily disarm or face the wrath of a military offensive, a deadline that was set by a regional framework under the auspices of the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Despite Rwanda's concerns over the continued glossing over the FDLR issue, international actors have been embroiled in rhetoric - several declarations have been made, UN resolutions and statements have been made but no action taken.

Speaking to The New Times, yesterday, the Ugandan High Commissioner to Rwanda, Richard Kabonero, said DR Congo has a primary obligation to flush out the FDLR and, where need be, they can seek for regional intervention.

"We have heard enough of these speeches and resolutions, we need action now. DR Congo, as a member of the ICGLR, should respect the Nairobi Pact that clearly states that no country should harbour a rebel or militia group," said Kabonero, who is also the dean of diplomats accredited to Rwanda.

No harbouring of armed groups

The ICGLR Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region was signed in Nairobi in 2006 by all the 11 member states and came into force in 2008.

It serves as a legal framework and an agenda of the ICGLR with the aim of creating the conditions for security, stability and development between the member states.

Article 6 of the pact urges member states to abstain from sending or supporting armed opposition forces or armed groups or insurgents against a member state, or from tolerating the presence, on their territory, of armed groups or insurgents engaged in conflicts or involved in acts of violence or subversion against the government of another state.'

Kabonero said: "If the Kinshasa government is unable to act, they can always invite in neighbouring countries to help as has happened in different operations like 'Umoja Wetu', 'Kimia I' and 'Kimia II'. Again, it doesn't matter if Monusco is playing delaying tactics, DR Congo can go after FDLR by itself since they are primarily responsible of flushing out the militia."

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Kabonero went on to point at what he termed as the UN double standards saying that when it came to attacking the M23 rebel group, Monusco and the Congolese Army, FARDC, acted in full force, but when it came to FDLR, instead of applying the same, the players resorted to tricks and games of rhetoric.

'UNSC not interested'

While addressing MPs, last week, the Minister of State in Charge of Cooperation, Amb. Eugene-Richard Gasana, who sat on the UN Security Council for two years as Rwanda's representative, contextualised the Council's activities with an expression of frustration, saying two-thirds of the Council's work is focused on Africa yet there is little of action being taken.

Amb. Gasana said such inaction only help give FDLR a stronger resolve to continue abuses with impunity.

"Who has interest in seeing conflicts coming to an end in DR Congo? None of those at the Security Council! It's so sad, it's frustrating but that's the fact. Security Council was created to prevent conflict but what it is doing is to manage conflicts. If they prevented conflicts, that would mean they would not have more work to do," said Gasana, who is Rwanda's Permanent Representative to the UN.

He alluded to some actors that may have interests in DR Congo conflicts since they continue to spend billions of dollars on Monusco, well aware of the fact that the heavily equipped force is not going to deliver on its mission.

"We are aware of the fact that these countries are business-minded and result-oriented but why would they continue spending billions of dollars every year on a force that is not delivering results? This is the explanation of FDLR and Monusco's existence in DR Congo," Amb. Gasana said.

His comments clearly indicated that there was little hope for the UN to go against FDLR, which leaves one alternative: regional bodies to work out a new plan without the UN and draw up offensive against FDLR.

Regional bloc challenged

To this end, the head of the European Union delegation in Rwanda, Michael Ryan, agrees, saying that regional actors have a primary goal to push for an offensive against the militia group.

"Everyone knew that an offensive against the FDLR would be harder than how it looked on paper but what needs to be done is mounting as much pressure on the Kinshasa

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government as possible to see something being done," said Amb. Ryan told The New Times yesterday.

He also observed that there are "skilled and complicated games" games that are being played when it comes to the FDLR question.

On the regional level, countries have lately been mired in misunderstandings with some accusing certain members of the ICGLR and SADC of having a soft spot for the FDLR militia - a reason that could hinder regional collaboration against the militia group.

Among those on spot are Tanzania and South Africa, whose leaders have been cited as being sympathetic toward the militia.

The United Nations Force Intervention Brigade, which is under Monusco and has the combat mandate that would allow them to go after the FDLR, is composed of troops from Malawi, Tanzania and South Africa.

A recent report by the UN Group of Experts pointed an accusing figure at Tanzania, where certain meetings by top leaders of the FDLR are said to have taken place since 2013, while some money transfers to the outfit were traced to have been made from Tanzanian territory.

On the other hand, South Africa has for years harboured Rwandan dissidents with established links to FDLR, members of the so-called Rwanda National Congress, whose support and links to FDLR have been proven in courts of law, during trials of some of the members of the two outfits.

The difficulties created in delaying an offensive against the FDLR is the basis of what pundits say is an inside job within the UN since it has much to benefit in the existence of the militia group.

Africa: UN Staying in Eastern DRC - for Now

Source: Institute for Security Studies (ISS) via AllAfrica.com

ANALYSIS

By Liesl Louw-Vaudran

The expression on the face of Martin Kobler, Special Representative of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), revealed

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nothing as the camera swept over him and various ambassadors seated in front of DRC President Joseph Kabila.

The video recording of the meeting convened by Kabila last Sunday doesn't show any of the tension between him and the US\$1.4 billion-a-year organisation that has been part of the landscape of the DRC for the past 15 years.

'The head of state officially announced to its partners that the DRC renounces any cooperation with MONUSCO [the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the DRC] in the operation of disarmament against the FDLR [Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda]' government spokesperson Lambert Mende said after the meeting. Kabila also warned the DRC partners and ambassadors to refrain from making statements that do not 'respect the state'. 'We want to say to the various actors, the DRC is not under guardianship of the UN or anyone else. We are not similar to Somalia,' Mende added.

The spat between the DRC and the UN is the latest episode in a stand-off that started with the UN's request to the Congolese government to replace two generals appointed to head the military operations against the FDLR due to allegations of human rights abuses. Congolese army generals Bruno Mandevu and Fall Sikabwe have been on the UN's so-called 'red list' for years and in terms of its mandate, the UN couldn't be seen to go ahead with the joint operation. Abuses by the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) in the eastern part of the country have been well documented by Human Rights Watch and others.

The disagreement over the FDLR operation raises several questions about the future of relations between the DRC and the UN. The UN withdrawal from the operation against the FDLR also provides a useful argument to those critics of the UN and of Kabila's government, notably neighbouring Rwanda, which maintains that the actors involved didn't want to attack the FDLR in the first place.

Following Kabila's rejection of MONUSCO's help on Sunday, the DRC government seems to have slightly tempered its stance by stating that nothing is stopping MONUSCO from 'carrying out its own operations against the FDLR'. In a recent interview, Mende also said that the tension in the relationship 'doesn't concern other missions that MONUSCO has been charged with'. Mende says a UN Security Council resolution 'gives a mandate to the mission to find and disarm the armed groups with or without the FARDC'.

Stephanie Wolters, Head of the Conflict Prevention and Risk Analysis division of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) says the conflict over the FDLR operation is a serious blow to relations between the two players. In the short term, the loss will be felt by the DRC. 'Now the UN will no longer be providing food, fuel and logistical support to the

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FARDC as it has done in the past. This is a blow to the Congolese army.' Wolters points out that this is not the first time Kabila has spoken out against MONUSCO, which has 22 000 uniformed personnel stationed in his country. In fact, the name change of the mission from MONUC (UN mission in the DRC) to MONUSCO (UN Stabilisation Mission in the DRC) in 2010 came after just such a spat, when Kabila said a peacekeeping mission was no longer needed in his country.

The UN's reasons for withdrawing from the FDLR operation are valid but there is more going on behind the scenes, says Wolters. It is clear that South Africa and Tanzania weren't all too keen on going ahead with the operations due to concerns about possible collateral damage among civilians, and the repercussions this would have back in South Africa. South African and Tanzanian troops make up the bulk of MONUSCO's Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), set up with a Chapter VII mandate from the UN to undertake offensive operations in the eastern DRC. The FIB was successful in defeating the M23 rebel group in mid-2013.

From the South African side, the main worry has been civilian casualties, since the FDLR are largely embedded in communities in eastern DRC. 'The possibility of civilians being killed has become been a key concern for the South African authorities,' Wolters says.

The FDLR operation was high on the agenda at the recent African Union (AU) summit in Addis Ababa, since the deadline for the FDLR to disarm had already expired on 2 January and a joint MONUSCO-FARDC operation was expected. In fact, in the run-up to the Assembly meeting on 30 and 31 January, South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, said an attack could happen 'as we are sitting here.'

Asked at the summit about the possible withdrawal of the UN troops from the FDLR operation due to the fear of civilian casualties, Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete brusquely answered that the FIB is part of the UN and that it is up to the latter to decide. 'Ask Ban Ki-moon,' Kikwete told journalists when he was door stepped with a question over the role of the FIB in the DRC.

Neighbouring Rwanda, which maintains that the FDLR is a serious security threat, predictably accuses both the DRC government and MONUSCO of finding excuses for not attacking the FDLR. The New Times, a pro-government Rwandan daily, didn't hesitate to slam the UN for its reticence to participate in the joint operation against the FDLR, largely made up of Hutus who fled after the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. 'Is the delayed offensive an inside job?' asked The New Times in an editorial. A Rwandan-

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based website, IGHE, titled a comment article in the same vein: 'UN playing ping-pong with FDLR rebels.'

Wolters says it would be a blow to peace in the DRC if the FDLR is not eventually disarmed. 'Rwanda has always used the FDLR as an excuse to come into eastern DRC. You eliminate that and we don't have to revisit that excuse a thousandth time.' Besides, the DRC has a legal obligation in terms of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region, which was signed in February 2013 that commits all the parties to end their support for rebels in the eastern DRC. The AU, the Southern African Development Community and the Intergovernmental Organisation on the Great Lakes Region are all guarantors to this agreement.

André Roux, a military expert and senior researcher at the ISS, says at this stage there are no signs that the FIB will withdraw from the area just because it has been excluded from the operation against the FDLR. Roux says although the FDLR has been responsible for attacks against civilians in the past, the greatest operational-level priority at the moment is to go after the Ugandan rebel group Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU), which has been gaining terrain and attacking civilians.

Roux notes that 'notwithstanding the political and long-term priority of dealing with FDLR, the FIB's tactical priorities have been first the M23, then ADF-NALU and thereafter the FDLR.' The switch to dealing with the FDLR has been driven by more strategic imperatives and influenced by political-level concerns by Rwanda, and the importance of keeping Rwanda positive towards the issue of stabilisation in the eastern DRC. Of late the FDLR has mainly focused on its lucrative economic activities in the resource-rich DRC, notably in the sale of charcoal, and has not been the major destabiliser in terms of attacks and civilian casualties.

Even if joint military operations continue, mending relations between the UN and the DRC on a political level may prove difficult, particularly since a recent fall-out between the UN and neighbouring Burundi led to the expulsion of a top UN official in the country. In both the DRC and Burundi, controversial plans to extend the mandates of the heads of state makes the UN an unwelcome witness in case of political upheaval. Kobler might not lose his job, but he will have to smile for the cameras to keep it.

Liesl Louw-Vaudran is an ISS Consultant.

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DR Congo vote will be key 'opportunity'

Source: AFP

19 February 2015 - The United States on Wednesday welcomed an announcement that the Democratic Republic of Congo will hold presidential elections in November 2016, after pushing President Joseph Kabila to respect the constitution.

The key vote would be "an opportunity for the Congolese government and its people to further the democratization of the country through regular, timely elections," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a statement.

Washington stood ready to help in what it said would be "the country's first peaceful transfer of power."

After months of uncertainty, the elections commission said the poll would go ahead on November 27 next year, but under certain conditions.

Deadly protests erupted in January over opposition fears that the incumbent Kabila was trying to extend his stay in power.

But Independent National Electoral Commission official Jean-Pierra Kalamba said the election depended on certain conditions, including the availability of funds to organize the polls, the updating of the electoral roll and issues surrounding parliamentary seat allocation.

Constitutionally, Kabila cannot stand in these elections after having served two terms in office, but he had tried to enact a new provision which would have allowed him to extend his time in office.

In May, top US diplomat John Kerry travelled to DR Congo to press Kabila not to modify the constitution.

Rwanda: U.S. Envoy Visits Gihembe Refugees, Pledges Advocacy to Pacify DR Congo

Source: The New Times (Rwanda)

By Theogene Nsengimana

19 February 2015 - The American Ambassador to Rwanda, Erica Barks-Ruggles, has pledged her government's support to ensure peace returns to eastern DR Congo so that refugees can return home.

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Amb. Barks-Ruggles made the pledge to thousands of Congolese refugees as she visited the Gicumbi-based Gihembe Refugee Camp which has hosted the refugees for nearly two decades.

"We will work closely with partners such as the ICGLR [International Conference on the Great Lakes Region] and others to see how peace can be restored in the DR Congo so that you can repatriate. However, as long as there is no peace in DR Congo, we will always keep on supporting you in education, health and other needs," she said.

The envoy added that her government has continued to resettle some of the Congolese refugees, and that, last year, 3,000 were successful resettled in the US.

"Those who were resettled can testify that their lives have changed. But there is no better home than one's motherland. Although we are resettling some of you, we will always make advocacy so that peace can be restored in DR Congo to enable your repatriation," Amb. Barks-Ruggles said.

The envoy, who began her new role three weeks ago, was accompanied by the Minister for Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs, Seraphine Mukantabana.

Refugees raise concerns:

In an interaction session, the refugees were allowed to raise their concerns, and the majority cited the high population in the camp and rights to further education for their children.

Jean Nsengimana, the president of the committee of parents in the camp, said the households have remained in the same three-by-four m-tre houses for almost 20 years, yet they have been growing.

"We are getting new family members (children) while the size of houses remains the same. Even those who want to expand their houses are not given tents. We need urgent support," he said.

Jeanne Kampire, a resident of the camp who completed secondary education with the financial support from the Buffett Foundation and the government, appealed for support for students that complete high school to be able to get tertiary education.

"We are glad that the Government of Rwanda granted us the chance to study up to the ordinary level. However, it would be better if we are given a chance to join the 12-Year Basic Education as well," Kampire said.

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Addressing the refugees, Minister Mukantabana said there is no need for them to expand their houses but rather it was better to identify those who have attained adult age among household members to be assisted to have their own houses.

Concerning education, the minister said there are negotiations between the Ministry of Education and the UN High Commission for Refugees to see how students from refugee camps can be integrated in national schools to pursue further studies.

Located in Gicumbi District in the north of Rwanda, Gihembe Refugee Camp was established in December 1997 to host the survivors of Mudende massacres.

Mudende was a refugee camp in north-western Rwanda hosting Congolese refugees from eastern DR Congo, who were between August and December 1997 attacked by armed militiamen.

Currently, 99 per cent of the 14,798 refugees in Gihembe camp are survivors of Mudende massacres.

Over 93 per cent of refugees surveyed in Gihembe are not willing to return home, citing concerns over insecurity and a fear of persecution based on their ethnicity, as well as lack of guarantees that they would recover their land and other property once they have returned home.

Celebrations as Burundi radio boss freed on bail

Source: AFP

Bujumbura, 19 February 2015 - A Burundi court on Wednesday released on bail a radio station director accused of "complicity" in the murder of three Italian nuns, his lawyer said.

Thousands of supporters marched on the streets to welcome his release, singing and dancing in celebration.

The arrest of Bob Rugurika, director of the popular independent African Public Radio (RPA), sparked protests by civil rights activists and fellow journalists.

Rugurika was arrested on January 21 after broadcasting the purported confession of a man claiming he was one of the killers.

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Lawyer Lambert Nigarura said he was released on a bail of 15 million Burundi francs (\$9,500, 8,400 euros), adding that while pleased he was out of jail there was a need for a proper investigation into the "real murderers of the three nuns."

For broadcasting the alleged confession, Rugurika was charged with complicity in the murders, "breach of public solidarity" and disclosing confidential information regarding a case.

The purported confession contradicted a police account of the crime and implicated the security services.

He faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Burundi, a small landlocked nation in central Africa's Great Lakes region, emerged in 2006 from a brutal 13-year civil war. The political climate remains fractious ahead of local, parliamentary and presidential polls in May and June.

But the crowd of several thousand who turned out to celebrate Rugurika's release were peaceful.

"We are here for the return of the RPA director because we love him, we support him, his radio fights for freedom throughout Burundi," said one supporter, singing in the streets.

Opposition politicians and critics say the government is doing all it can to sideline political challengers ahead of the elections, including arrests, harassment and a clampdown on free speech.

The three Roman Catholic nuns, aged between 75 and 83, were murdered at a convent north of Bujumbura in September.

Burundi President Fires Spy Chief after Three Months in Post

Source: Bloomberg

By Desire Nimubona

19 February 2015 - Burundi's president fired the country's intelligence chief, Godefroid Niyombare, less than three months after he was appointed, according to a government decree.

Niyombare was ordered removed from the post on Wednesday, according to the statement on the website of the East African nation's presidency. No reason was given

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for his dismissal, nor were they details on who will succeed him. Under Burundian law, his replacement must be approved by the country's Senate.

The decision may have stemmed from opposition to President Pierre Nkurunziza seeking a third term in elections scheduled for June, Radio France Internationale reported, citing people it didn't identify.

The United Nations Security Council on Wednesday urged Burundi to establish a "climate of freedom" for the vote. It expressed concern over reports of intimidation, harassment and arbitrary detention faced by people including journalists and human-rights activists, according to the UN's website.

Niyombare, who previously served as an ambassador to Kenya, was named head of Burundi's national intelligence service in late November, replacing Adolphe Nshimirimana.

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Rwanda: U.S. Envoy to Focus on Health, Social Devt. during Tenure

Source: The New Times (Rwanda)

By Collins Mwai

16 February 2015 - The Governments of Rwanda and the United States have had a long history of cooperation in a range of issues, from business to security matters. Last month, the US Government dispatched Erica J. Barks-Ruggles as its new ambassador to Rwanda. The New Times' Collins Mwai caught up with the envoy for an interview, during which she spoke about priority areas during her tour of duty, and a wide range of issues, including the threat posed by eastern DR Congo-based FDLR militia, a group comprised largely of remnants of people culpable for the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Excerpts:

What is your take on the current bilateral relations between the two countries?

We have an extremely strong relationship with Rwanda; a robust respectful relationship, which cuts across a huge number of important issues, both for bilateral relations and for

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the region. We have an extensive cooperation in economic development, health, education, good governance, peace and security.

In health and education, we have five US government agencies that are working on a programme with more than Rwf63 billion this year, together with international partners and the Ministry of Health, to continue to our efforts on malaria, HIV/Aids and further strengthening the Rwandan health system.

We have made some huge gains and progress; we had a few problems and learnt a few lessons in the process, particularly on malaria but, overall, the trend has been positive.

In economic development, we have a series of American investors in the private sector and also programmes in the public sector to assist with that. Part of it has been in agriculture which is at the heart of the Rwandan economy; this year we are spending Rwf2.3 billion on a programme called 'Feed the Future', which is an initiative to support improvements in food security as well as economic development of the agriculture sector.

We have programmes looking at value added products, transportation from farm to markets as well as helping farmers improve the quality of their products. We also have a programme that is looking at private sector investment, in the agriculture sector, this year alone, for instance, in the dairy sector, we have created 6,000 jobs in the country.

'Power Africa' is another very important project; it is a \$20-billion five-year project that was announced by President Barrack Obama on his last visit to Africa. Just in the last week, my first trip out of Kigali was to the Global Giga Watt solar project.

Most of the partnership seems to be in the nature of government to government, do we have instances of private sector's involvement in terms of investments?

We have Symbion Energy, which is signing a memorandum of understanding to invest in the methane gas project in Lake Kivu. We also have Land O' Lakes dairy cooperative working with dairy cooperatives here to improve their products in terms of quality and also the time from the farm to the market place so that they do not lose much along the chain.

We are also working with a number of NGO's in various efforts, for example, in the education sector; at Peace Corps we have 115 volunteers split evenly in education and healthcare. Our NGO sector has been very involved both as partners of the government and through their own involvement.

What are the areas that you plan on giving priority during your tour of duty?

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I would say that near and dear to my heart, health is one of them, if people are not healthy, they cannot stay in school or work. Continuing our robust partnership, especially in HIV/Aids prevention and working on how we can get to an Aids-free generation in the future.

Malaria is another challenge, which is equally important. We have been working with the government to figure out what went wrong this last year with the malaria bed nets that were unfortunately substandard. We were able to help investigate what went wrong which will help them avoid this kind of thing in the future. Health is absolutely important for the future of the country and for the future of the world.

We all need good health and good education.

The economic development will be another focus. I want to make every effort I can to help every US investor - for those who are interested -get the (feasibility) studies done, for those who need them, as well as getting through the systems because I think private sector investment is absolutely critical to economic growth.

Regional security and good governance, you need strong democratic institutions with the accountability to people, that can tackle corruption and that work together on regional issues to have that security for the long term but we also need to address the short term insecurity issues and the FDLR issue is really important .

The other thing is looking at global issues that affect all of us, critical among which is climate change because it is affecting the whole planet and I think we need to work together to find solutions because none of us have the magic key.

Going by the support over the years, are you content with the administration and impacts of the assistance?

Rwanda has a very good track record of accountability and use of assistance in both local NGOs and the government. One of the things I want to do while I am here is to get out and see the rest of Rwanda. I want to go out and see the impacts for myself.

It is important for me to understand how our programmes are working by talking to Rwandans and seeing what we have been able to do and what they have also been able to achieve. Through this, we will learn where we need to make adjustments and where we need to bring in more support.

The US government established a reward for justice programme nearly a decade ago. Among the subjects are suspects of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Years later, we have key masterminds on the list like Felicien Kabuga still on the run...

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Last year, Steve Rapp, who is our special envoy on war crimes, announced that we were changing slightly in splitting out the war crimes part from our global reward for justice programme, which is more focused on terrorism.

We needed a separate line for war crimes; we now have a war crimes rewards programme which offers rewards up to \$5 million for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of war criminals. There are nine Rwandans who are on that 'wanted' list; three remain before the ICTR and six whose cases have been transferred to the Rwandan Government by the ICTR.

Those nine remain on our list and we will be happy to pay our rewards for information that leads to their arrest and conviction. We are working closely with the Ministry of Justice on those issues.

The FDLR militia issue has now become a 20-year-old tale. The January 2 deadline lapsed more than a month ago but we are yet to see any efforts to flush out the group except for rhetorics. Your government has on several occasions called for neutralisation of the group, what should be the critical way forward?

The US Special Envoy to the Great Lakes, Region Russ Feingold (who was recently touring the region), has really been working hard on the issue, he said during a media briefing in Kinshasa recently that eliminating FDLR is an important part of the unfinished business, it needs to be taken care of now.

We believe (military action against the FDLR) needs to start now, we believe that it needs to be coordinated by FARDC and Monusco forces. We have given our full support for that on the government's promise that it is going to happen and we believe it needs to happen.

We have also said that once it starts, it has to be sustained and it needs to be comprehensive. Military action is the stand now as has been directed the Security Council and that is where we need to be.

We are going to keep pressing on this because we understand the continued instability in eastern DR Congo affects not only Congo, where it has huge effects on their economy and their ability to develop, but also on the region; Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. We believe we have an opportunity here as the international community to address this issue.

Still on FDLR, do you think that the recently established East African Standby Force would be better placed to deal with the militia group?

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We would like to commend the regional effort to put this force in place a year ahead of schedule, which shows an incredible effort has been put in by the region and we recommend the whole region on this. We think it is an important initiative and effort.

It is up to the region to say where such a force will be deployed. We can see that there might be various places, whether in South Sudan, against Lord's Resistance Army rebels in the future, but it is really up to the region working together with the African Union because that is how this was set up. For us, we view our role as how can we support.

What do you make of the ongoing regional integration efforts in the East African Community?

Speaking from our own experience, our two biggest trading partners according to most people are Europe and China. But the answer is Canada and Mexico, our closest neighbours who we share a border with. We have people and goods back and forth across the border.

The same can be true and should be true no matter where, including in this region. The more countries trade with each other, the more they exchange information, the more they work together on issues which brings them together and makes people understand that they are invested in each other which helps improve stability and peace.

I applaud regional integration efforts as we have seen how much they have done for our stability and economy and ability to provide better opportunity for our citizens.

US eases sanctions on Sudan

Source: APA

18 February 2015 - The United States has partially eased economic sanctions imposed on Sudan since 1997, the Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced.

OFAC said in a statement seen by APA on Wednesday claimed it amended Sudan's sanctions regime to allow exports of personal communications hardware and software including smart phones and laptops.

US special envoy to Sudan, Donald Booth emphasised that the move aims to help ordinary citizens by connecting them to the rest of the world.

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“These changes also support our aim to help Sudanese citizens integrate into the global digital community” Booth told reporters.

“These changes are consistent with our commitment to promote freedom of expression through access to communications tools he added.

The Sudanese government has welcomed the US move.

Sudan’s Foreign Minister, Ali Karti, said in a statement on Wednesday that Washington’s decision reflects its conviction that Khartoum has rights which should be met.

Ties between Khartoum and Washington could improve if the US administration carried out its pledges Mr. Karti said.

The two countries had earlier agreed to engage in dialogue which actually began during the recent visit of Sudan’s presidential assistant, Ibrahim Ghandour to Washington.

Ghandour concluded a rare visit to Washington where he held talks with senior officials at the White House.

Since 1993 Sudan has been on the US list of countries supporting terrorism.

It has been targeted by US economic sanctions since 1997.