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



MEDIA MONITORING

3 February 2015

AU set for economic integration talks in the Great Lakes area

Source: Guardian on Sunday via IPP Media

By Felister Peter

1 February 2015 - African countries forming the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework will later this year conduct the Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Forum to strengthen economic integration and foster peacemaking efforts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the region as a whole.

The decision was reached here yesterday during the Fifth High-level Meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the PSC which was attended by Heads of State from 11 member countries, including Tanzania under the chairmanship of the United Nations Secretary General, Ban ki-Moon.

The main agenda of the meeting was to discuss the actions taken since the January 2nd deadline on FDLR voluntary surrender, status of implementation of Nairobi Declarations of the Kampala Dialogue on repatriation of ex M23 to DRC and implementation of the PSC framework on economic cooperation and regional integration.

In an interview with The Guardian on Sunday soon after the meeting, Tanzania's Foreign and International Cooperation Minister, Benard Membe said the leaders are optimistic that peace can be attained and maintained through economic integration.

"We resolved to unite our countries through economic incorporation...the major purpose is to restore peace in the DRC and Great Lakes region," said Membe.

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According to him, economic cooperation expands business opportunities, creates jobs and can help in bringing about long term stability and peace in the region.

He said after successful removal of the M23 rebels in Republic of Congo, the countries agreed to unite efforts in enhancing peace and to remove the remaining rebel groups.

On implementation of the January 2nd deadline on removing the FDRL rebels from DRC, the Minister said that signatory parties to the PSC framework and agreement backed the government of DRC's decision but cautioned that operation should be conducted in strict observance of human rights in order to reduce collateral damage and social casualties.

"We have agreed that before military operations starts, there should be high level intelligence to obtain specific information and identification of the FDRL rebels because most of them live in residential areas and have families," said the Minister.

He noted that direct attack on the rebels may result in death of women, children and their relatives. He said there is no deadline for information gathering on the whereabouts of the rebels but the exercise that commences soon is expected to be completed within a short period.

The Minister said Tanzania's army officers currently in the DRC operate under the umbrella of Force Intervention Brigade (FBI) comprising Malawi, South Africa, and Tanzania.

Sommet de l'UA: dans le huis clos d'une réunion sur la RDC

Source: RFI

En marge du sommet des chefs d'Etat de l'Union africaine, qui s'est achevé samedi 31 janvier à Addis-Abeba, s'est tenue une réunion d'évaluation de l'accord-cadre pour la paix dans la région des Grands Lacs, et particulièrement à l'est de la RDC. Ban Ki-moon a présidé la rencontre, en présence notamment du président tanzanien, du vice-président angolais et du commissaire paix et sécurité de l'UA. Sujet du jour : la lutte contre les FDLR, alors que l'armée congolaise a annoncé le début des opérations contre les rebelles hutus rwandais. Ces opérations sont unanimement saluées mais doivent se dérouler, selon le communiqué final, dans le strict respect des droits des populations civiles.

1er février 2015 - Un absent de marque dans cette réunion de suivi : le Rwanda. Pourtant, le président Kagame et sa ministre des Affaires étrangères Louise

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Mushikiwabo étaient présents à l'ouverture du sommet des chefs d'Etat la veille. Le Rwanda aurait considéré qu'il s'agissait de la réunion de trop, et que le temps n'est plus aux paroles mais aux actes.

Les discussions ont eu lieu à huis clos. Selon un diplomate étranger, jamais des positions aussi favorables aux opérations militaires ne s'étaient exprimées, de la part de l'Afrique du Sud et de la Tanzanie, accusées jusqu'ici de ne pas être très enclines à laisser leurs troupes et la brigade d'intervention des Nations unies y participer.

« Si ça tourne mal »

Comme d'autres, les ministres sud-africains et tanzaniens se sont toutefois inquiétés des conséquences pour les civils vivant dans les zones contrôlées par les Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) et d'opérations militairement plus complexes que contre la rébellion du Mouvement du 23-Mars.

Ce ne sera pas une promenade dans le parc, a même déclaré à l'assistance un ministre sud-africain. L'Afrique du Sud craint de voir se répéter le scénario de 2009, où des civils avaient été tués, des villages brûlés et des femmes violées. « Nous sommes une démocratie et si ça tourne mal, l'opposition et la société civile ne nous feront pas de cadeaux », a confié un diplomate sud-africain.

Dans son discours, à l'ouverture de ce mini-sommet sur les Grands Lacs, le secrétaire général des Nations unies a insisté pour que tous les pays de la région ayant des élections prévues ces prochaines années respectent la volonté de leur peuple, sans préciser ce qu'il avait dit la veille sur les réformes de la Constitution ou les chefs d'Etat qui s'accrochent au pouvoir.

Quid des ex-M23 ?

Si Ban Ki-moon s'est félicité de l'issue favorable trouvée à la crise liée à la nouvelle loi électorale de RDC - là aussi, sans mentionner les manifestations et les victimes -, le ministre congolais des Affaires étrangères aurait dit : « Les propos tenus par certains de nos partenaires dans des moments difficiles ne nous aident pas. » Le tout sur un ton resté néanmoins des plus diplomatiques.

Il a été aussi question du sort des ex-rebelles du M23 présents en Ouganda. Le représentant de Kampala a clairement signifié ne plus souhaiter les accueillir sur son territoire. Une fois de plus, les participants ont déploré le peu d'avancées dans l'amnistie et le rapatriement de ces ex-combattants, plus d'un an après la signature des déclarations de Nairobi mettant fin à leur conflit avec le gouvernement congolais.

RÉACTION AMÉRICAINE

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Après la nomination, il y a quelques jours dans le Nord-Kivu, d'officiers soupçonnés de graves violations des droits de l'homme à la tête de l'opération annoncée contre les FDLR, dans le sillage des Nations unies, l'envoyé spécial des Etats-Unis sur les Grands Lacs Russ Feingold met à son tour l'accent sur la protection des civils vivant dans les zones contrôlées par les rebelles.

RFI : Quelle est la position américaine suite à l'annonce par l'armée congolaise d'une offensive dans l'est du pays ?

Russ Feingold : Nous sommes heureux que le gouvernement congolais ait reconnu la nécessité de passer à l'action, qu'il ait annoncé que les opérations allaient commencer, qu'il ait accepté le soutien de la Monusco. Je pense qu'il faut laisser une chance aux Congolais, et voir s'ils vont effectivement de l'avant avec cette opération. Mais la meilleure manière de gérer cette affaire, c'est de coopérer au maximum. La Monusco pourrait apporter beaucoup à cette opération. Les officiers de la Monusco ont envie d'aider les FARDC (Forces armées de RDC, NDLR) à faire leur travail.

Que faire avec les civils qui vivent dans ces zones ?

C'est l'une des questions les plus importantes. La Monusco et ceux d'entre nous qui la soutiennent croient que c'est crucial de protéger les civils. Et la Monusco a mis au point un plan pour protéger les civils.

Mais la force de l'ONU n'est plus vraiment impliquée dans la planification.

Ils essaient autant que possible de planifier la protection des civils. Dans tous les cas, ce doit être l'une des principales priorités dans les opérations : faire tout ce qui est possible pour protéger les civils. Nous parlons de ce problème avec les autorités congolaises régulièrement. Et ils nous ont bien sûr dit qu'ils allaient se soucier de cette question. Mais les bons officiers de la Monusco pourraient vraiment aider à protéger les civils.

DR Congo says offensive against Hutu rebels underway

Source: AFP

31 January 2015 - Congolese government troops have started their long-awaited offensive against Rwandan Hutu rebels in the east of the country, the DR Congo's foreign minister said Saturday.

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The Kinshasa government and the international community had given the FDLR -- the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda -- an ultimatum to lay down their arms and surrender by January 2 or face attacks and forcible disarmament.

Older members of the FDLR are held responsible for taking part in the 1994 genocide in neighbouring Rwanda, when at least 800,000 people, mainly from the Tutsi minority, were massacred, and the rebel group has continued to fight in the mineral-rich eastern provinces of DR Congo.

"The action has started and will not stop until we have neutralised these negative forces," Raymond Tshibanda told AFP on the sidelines of an African Union summit being held in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa.

"The determination of the government is such that there will be no let up until we have finished this group," he said.

The African Union's commissioner for peace and security, Smail Chergui, welcomed the announcement, and said the FDLR has continued to recruit fighters despite their promise to disarm.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, also attending a meeting on Africa's Great Lakes region on the sidelines of the AU summit, said the UN's Monusco based in the country force stood ready to help DR Congo troops to eliminate the FDLR "once and for all".

Several diplomats and observers, however, have questioned Kinshasa's resolve to fight the rebels, given that no action appeared to be taking place on the ground.

"I have not been informed of the slightest thing," a European military official said in Kinshasa, adding that DR Congo troops only appeared to be advancing into areas that have already been abandoned by the FDLR.

Dealing with the FDLR is seen as a key step to ending decades of conflict in the Great Lakes region. Rwanda has described the FDLR as a major threat to its national security, and has in turn been accused of sponsoring rival rebel groups to fight them.

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DR Congo and Rwanda's FDLR rebels: Why Tanzania could end up eating leftovers

Source: Mail & Guardian Africa

By Christine Mungai

Tanzania's position on the FDLR rebels is puzzling, and it is putting far too much on the line - for benefits that are unclear.

3 February 2015 - THIS week could finally see the launch of a military offensive against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) in the eastern DR Congo, after the rebel group failed to comply with a January 2 deadline to lay down their weapons and surrender or face military action and by forcefully disarmed.

The operation against the FDLR was initially meant to be a joint effort between the UN and the Congolese army, but last week it was announced that it would principally be carried out by the Congolese army – known by their initials FARDC (Armed Forces of the DRC) – with only logistical support, such as helicopter gunships, from the UN.

Reports indicate that UN's withdrawal from the frontline comes after the Congolese army wanted to lead the offensive, but according to the UN's own rules, its forces cannot be involved in fighting unless it is also commanding the operation.

That shift in command may seem like a small technical detail, but it has major ramifications for the success of the mission, and has serious regional implications too.

For one, the Congolese army itself has long been accused of providing arms, military support and intelligence to the FDLR.

A damning report in November by human rights organisation Enough Project revealed in detail how the Congolese army collaborates with the FDLR in profiteering from eastern Congo's vast natural resources. (READ: How to finance your rebellion: forget 'blood diamonds', blood charcoal is the new thing)

The rebels' biggest money maker at the moment is the charcoal trade, which they directly exploit from the Congolese forests and also levy taxes on local villagers involved in the trade.

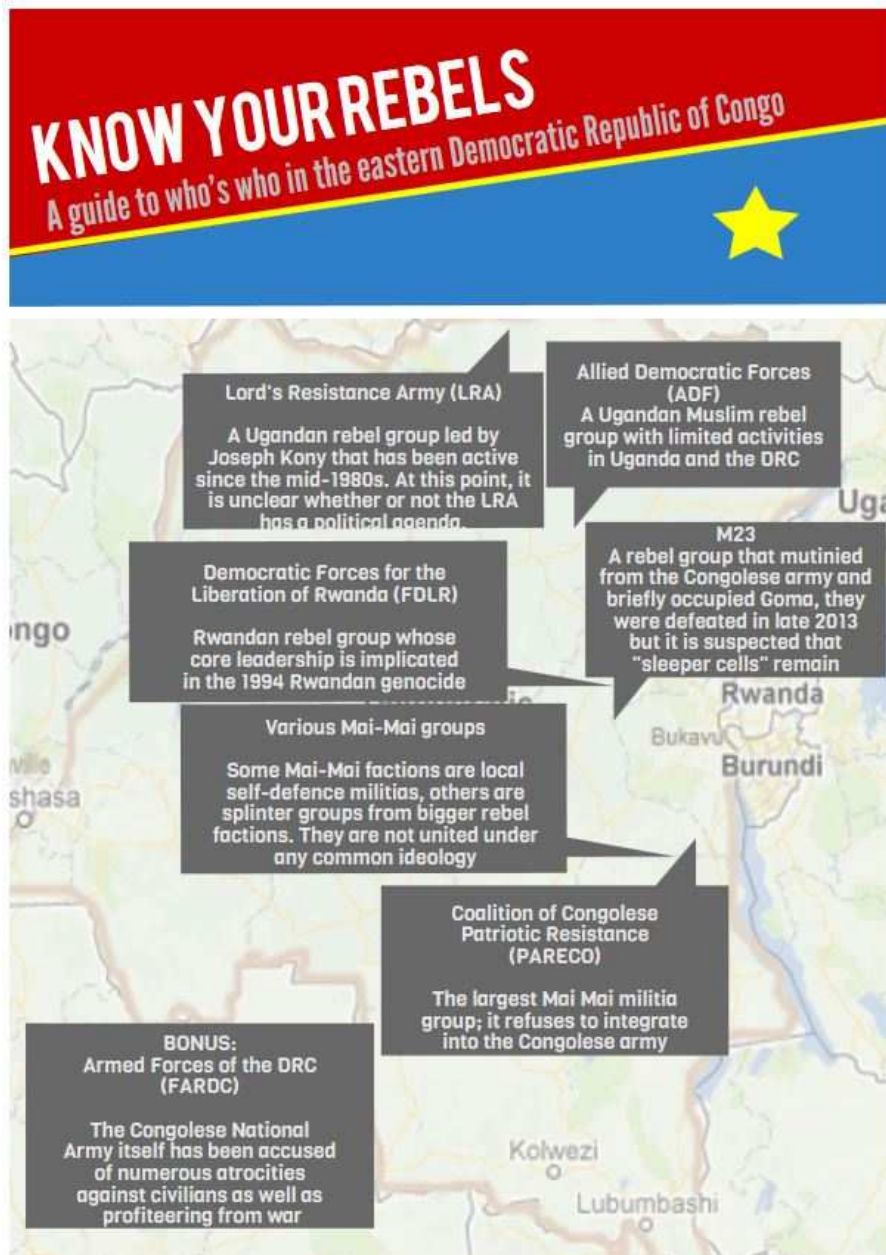
The FDLR also has interests in gold mining, cannabis, illegal fishing and poaching in the region, whose proceeds they share with the Congolese army in exchange for the safe passage of goods.

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Therefore having the Congolese army leading the offensive against their alleged business partners throws serious doubt on the success of the mission – it is more likely that the army will just make a feeble show of attacking the rebels, and retreat claiming they have been overpowered.

But the UN's standing down also buys time for Tanzania and South Africa, the two countries making up the majority of UN's Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the eastern DRC.



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South Africa for the money

For South Africa “it’s just business, it’s not personal.” Under President Joseph Kabila’s administration, South Africa-DRC relations have flourished, and South Africa has become the biggest supplier of goods and services to DRC, providing more than 21% of the country’s imports.

As president, Kabila is commander-in-chief of the Congolese armed forces, and so it could be argued that ultimately, the army’s alleged support to FDLR can be traced back to him – it’s not lost on observers that Kabila’s primary support comes from the east, but he’s deeply unpopular in the west and in the capital Kinshasa.

In September, twenty-five South African companies visited DRC in search of investment and export opportunities, as part of a delegation organised by the Department of Trade and Industry.

The business delegation comprised companies in the agriculture and agro-processing, infrastructure, built environment, energy, mining and capital equipment, electro technical and medical equipment, solutions and supplies sectors.

In 2013, South Africa gave a breath of life to the long-planned Grand Inga Dam project on the mouth of the Congo River; construction is scheduled to start this October.

South African power utility Eskom committed itself to buying more than half of the power – 2,500 megawatts – from the 4,800 megawatts generated by the first phase of the Grand Inga Hydro Electric Power complex.

In the mining sector, South Africa has so far been losing out to countries like China and Canada in securing mining concessions in the DRC; for example, 90% of the minerals extracted from Katanga province are exported to China.

South Africa needs a stable DRC to effectively wield its “economic diplomacy”, and invigorate its own ailing economy.

And as the country with the most developed mining sector in Africa, South Africa sees itself as naturally having the most to leverage in Africa in order to profit from DRC’s minerals, without overtly looking like it’s there to loot and pillage – a charge that tainted the reputation of the other African armies in the Congo during the ‘African World War’ of 1998-2003, including Uganda, Rwanda, Angola and Zimbabwe.

Laundering FDLR

Tanzania has an interest in seeing a stable DRC as it has often had to bear the burden of hosting refugees. In northwestern Tanzania, the UN is hosting 100,000 refugees from

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the Congo basin, but that region of Tanzania is among the poorest and most marginalised in the country.

UNHCR says that local communities often feel threatened by the influx of migrants and the refugee situation is often played up for political gain.

Even so, Tanzania is in a particularly delicate situation, and unfortunately seems to have come up with the short end of the stick. It risks being left to eat leftovers after other players have had the banquet. This is because putting its neck on the line far more than any other country in the region, and for benefits that do not seem commensurate with the risks.

In the first place, South Africa has the advantage of geographical distance, such that if things go wrong in the Congo, its domestic politics can remain relatively detached. Tanzania, however, shares a border with DRC over Lake Tanganyika, and continues to be directly affected by the happenings in the Congo.

But more importantly, Tanzania seems to have taken on the very difficult and unpleasant job – that of attempting to “clean up” the reputation of the FDLR.

The FDLR are considered the epicentre of the various groups marauding the eastern Congo, and several of its leaders were involved in perpetrating the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Tanzania’s foreign minister Bernard Membe has been quoted as referring to the rebels as “freedom fighters”, a position that is difficult to justify without re-framing the 1994 genocide – which Paul Kagame’s Rwanda considers genocide revisionism and denial, a extremely grievous crime. The fact that there is a vocal constituency arguing that Kagame’s Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) rebels, and subsequently troops, committed atrocities too during the war and in DRC, is probably not about to equalise the sins of the two sides.

Lost battle

Thus unless Kagame does something exceptionally egregious inside DR Congo, Tanzania will probably lose the PR battle, especially given that one its key allies, the US, has shifted dramatically to take a hardline against FDLR.

The atrocities of 1994 genocide are so salient in Africa’s – and the world’s – consciousness that trying to “legitimise” the FDLR, who continue to call for the extermination of the Tutsis, seems very likely to fail.

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And more importantly, since the 2005 peace agreement in South Sudan – the Sudan conflict had become a vortex in the region, drawing in nearly the whole of the Horn of Africa – it has become increasingly out of date for a country to be seen to explicitly support rebels in a neighbouring country.

Furthermore, Tanzania doesn't have much of the solid commercial interests in the DR Congo that South Africa, France, or Belgium do, making its position regarding the FDLR puzzling especially considering that it is a country with a history of being geopolitically astute.

In the words of the eminent philosopher Bertrand Russell, it is seldom justifiable to embark on any policy that, though harmful in the present, will be beneficial in the long run, simply because the distant consequences of an action (a happy, stable DRC) are much more uncertain than immediate consequences

(Tanzania's image of a haven of pan-African liberation being decidedly tarnished by being seen to support genocidaires).

In any case with all these undercurrents, it is unlikely that the operation against the FDLR will succeed, or even be launched – sadly, it seems it is just better for everyone, except the Congolese people, for the situation to remain as it is.

United Nations chief Ban Ki-Moon pledges solidarity with Africans

Source: Xinhua

Addis Ababa, 31 January 2015 - United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon on Friday pledged solidarity with African countries to rejuvenate the fight against Ebola, terrorism and civil strife.

During his address to the 24th summit of the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, Ban said that Ebola and terrorism remained mortal threat to Africa's stability and progress.

"Terrorism knows no boundaries and affects African countries in the Horn, the Sahel and elsewhere. No grievance or cause justifies terror," Ban told African leaders.

Security challenges and Ebola were dominant themes during the biannual event. Ban decried extremism that has fuelled violence against innocent civilians in Kenya, Nigeria, Mali, Libya and Niger.

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"In Nigeria and beyond, we are all appalled by the brutality of Boko Haram which poses clear danger to national, regional and global security," Ban said.

African leaders will discuss the possibility of sending a continental standby force to root out Boko Haram in northern Nigeria at the two-day gathering.

The militant group is behind a wave of killings and kidnapping of civilians in Nigeria and neighboring countries like Cameroon and Chad.

Ban called for a concerted effort to combat Boko Haram and other terrorist groups in Africa, saying that the UN will support the quest for peace, security and development in Africa.

Ban said the global body will partner with regional blocs to restore peace in trouble spots like Somalia, the great lakes region, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Libya.

"In Somalia, our joint efforts to attain lasting peace are making some headway.

"In Central African Republic, our collaboration to protect civilians and combat impunity remains critical," remarked the secretary general.

He added the UN and AU will support dialogue to resolve conflict in South Sudan.

"I urge South Sudan leaders to reach an immediate and inclusive power sharing arrangement with a transitional government.

"They must implement the agreement to end this man made tragedy," said Ban.

There is need for global solidarity to combat Ebola and other contagious diseases wreaking havoc in Africa.

The UN chief hailed African governments for their collective response to Ebola pandemic in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

"Last month, I travelled to Ebola affected countries and witnessed progress in combating the pandemic. I thank African governments and people for their solidarity in this battle," Ban noted.

He urged the international community to commit more resources to strengthen the fight against Ebola.

"This outbreak confirmed the risks that fragile health systems pose for our interconnected World," Ban added.

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EXCLUSIVE - UN support for Congo campaign against Rwanda rebels in doubt over abuses

Source: Reuters World Service

By Michelle Nichols and Aaron Ross

United Nations, 30 January 2015 - United Nations support for a planned military operation against Rwandan rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo could be in doubt because Congo named a general accused of rights abuses to head the offensive, diplomats and officials said on Friday.

General Bruno Mandevu was appointed on Sunday to head a Congolese army (FARDC) operation against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), which had been jointly planned with the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUSCO).

Western diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Mandevu had been placed by MONUSCO on a so-called red list over accusations of 121 rights violations, including summary executions and rapes.

"If, because of the past record of units or their commanders, there are substantial grounds to believe there is a real risk that they commit grave human rights violations, support to those units will be withheld unless adequate mitigating measures can be put in place," a senior MONUSCO official told Reuters.

"In this particular case, this process has brought to light some concerns that have been brought to the attention of the DRC government. Discussions are underway at the highest level to address them," the official said.

During a U.N.-backed offensive against the FDLR in 2009, Congolese soldiers were accused by rights groups of massacring hundreds of civilians and committing wide-ranging abuses. The Congolese army denied the scale of the alleged abuses.

The FARDC and the Congolese government were not immediately available for comment.

A U.N. peacekeeping official in New York said that under the United Nations human rights due diligence policy, the world body has to "ensure that its support to non-U.N. security forces will not contribute to grave human rights violations."

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The U.N. peacekeeping mission in Congo threatened in 2013 to withdraw support for two Congolese battalions accused of involvement in the mass rape. The mission decided to keep working with the battalions after 12 senior officers, including the commanders and deputy commanders, were suspended and about a dozen soldiers were charged over the rapes in Minova.

U.N. peacekeepers and Congolese troops completed preparatory work for the offensive against the FDLR earlier this month and were waiting for Congolese President Joseph Kabila to sign off on a joint military plan so combat operations could start.

But during a meeting on Sunday with MONUSCO chief Martin Kobler and envoys from the United States, Britain, France, Belgium and the European Union, Kabila said that it would be an FARDC operation and not a joint campaign with the United Nations, said diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity.

They said Kabila told Kobler and the envoys that FARDC Chief of Staff Didier Etumba would provide a revised operations plan to tackle the FDLR, a group that includes former soldiers and Hutu militiamen responsible for Rwanda's 1994 genocide.

"It is not a joint operation, it is one that is being led by the FARDC with support from MONUSCO," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters earlier on Friday.

"We will participate, provide support operationally, logistically and strategically. MONUSCO and the FARDC together will conduct regular joint evaluations of the operations," Dujarric said.

The FDLR failed to meet a January deadline to disarm and surrender. U.N. officials say there are an estimated 1,400 FDLR rebels still in eastern Congo.

"Operations v. FDLR must ensure protection of civilians, minimize civilian impact and track with U.N. human rights due diligence policy," U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, tweeted on Thursday.

In Addis Ababa, senior UN officials pledge ongoing cooperation with Africa on all fronts vital

Source: newkerala.com

Addressing the African Union (AU) Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at the start of what he called a "crucial year for global action to secure our global future," the

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United Nations Secretary-General on Thursdaysaid he looked forward to African countries realizing their massive cultural, human and economic potential.

New York, 31 January 2015 - "African countries have been the backbone and leading Member States of the United Nations since the day they achieved independence," Ban said, noting their growth in numbers from four States in 1945 to 54 in 2015. "In this critical year, we need Africa to help guide the way to a world of sustainability and dignity for all the people, where nobody will be left behind."

Throughout his speech, the Secretary-General stressed the centrality of Africa to the UN's work and promised that the UN would stand with Africa as a partner and the "strongest supporter" of the continent's efforts to achieve peace and security and all aspects of sustainable development.

The President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, also spotlighted the importance of the year ahead and specifically, his selection of the theme 'Delivering on and Implementing a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda' for his Presidency of the 69th Session.

Having launched the negotiating process for the successor framework to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Kutesa said the post-2015 agenda' overarching objective would be poverty eradication. Adequate means of implementation - such as financing and technology development and transfer - and mobilisation of resources at the national level, through public and private channels, by attracting more foreign direct investment and by strengthening global partnerships, would be essential and he said he would convene a High-level Thematic Debate on "Means of Implementation for a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda" in New York on 9-10 February this year.

The Secretary-General pointed to gains already made thanks to the MDGs and looked forward to adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, including a set of sustainable development targets, and to a meaningful, universal climate change agreement in Paris in December.

"No continent has more at stake in these negotiations than Africa," he stressed, underlining the importance of the Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa in July. "Without resources, our commitments to sustainable development will amount to little more than fine words on paper."

Fulfilling the aspirations and wishes of the continent's people required leaders to listen to their people.

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"People around the world have expressed their concern about leaders who refuse to leave office when their terms end," he said. "I share those concerns. Undemocratic constitutional changes and legal loopholes should never be used to cling to power."

Alongside that call, the Secretary-General highlighted the AU's long history of supporting democratic transitions, saying that he hoped elections due to take place in African countries over the course of 2015 would be as peaceful and successful as those in Tunisia, Botswana, Malawi, Zambia and others in 2014.

He noted other positive developments from the previous year, including affirmation by the AU's Human Rights Commission of the rights of lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals and the Cotonou Declaration on the abolition of the death penalty in Africa. He was also pleased to welcome the AU Commission of Inquiry report on South Sudan and the final report of the Commission of Inquiry for the Central African Republic.

The focus of the African Union's "Agenda 2063" on gender equality and the empowerment of women was another positive step and he hoped for its formal adoption during the Summit. However, he called for even quicker action, urging African States to make a deep and lasting difference to the lives of women and girls by 2020.

"We have much more work to do to unleash [their] tremendous potential," emphasized the UN chief. "They need better access to secondary education, decent work and economic opportunities. They need more help to combat maternal mortality and poverty, and genital mutilation. They need more protection from the scourge of violence at the hands of men and boys."

The General Assembly President also took up the AU Summit's "important and timely" focus on women's empowerment and Africa's development and said he would mark 20 years of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by convening a High-level thematic debate on the subject on 5 March.

The event aims "to galvanize political commitment and action towards achieving greater gender quality and women's empowerment," he said, citing equitable land distribution, property and inheritance rights, and access to credit and markets as critical steps for the empowerment of women.

"In this new era of Africa's progress, we must not shy away from taking bold decisions to empower women and girls," he said.

The Secretary-General pointed to the need for Africa's development agenda to provide affordable, quality healthcare, a fact illustrated most clearly by the impact of the Ebola crisis. Having recently visited Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Mali, he praised the

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support, solidarity and generous contributions of African Governments and people to their efforts.

"We are seeing clear signs of progress," he said. "I urge the international community to commit more resources at this critical time."

Cooperation is also essential to the progress seen on the peace and security front, he said, pointing to several examples of combined operations, including the joint mission with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Burkina Faso, the partnership between the UN, the AU and the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) in Somalia, and continued collaboration between the UN and AU in Sudan and Libya.

Peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Great Lakes region required joint decisive action, and it was time to redouble joint efforts towards peace and stability in South Sudan. He also welcomed the specific focus of the AU's Peace and Security Council on the issue of Boko Haram in Nigeria.

"The humanitarian consequences are enormous, with up to one million people forced from their homes," he said. "This group continues to kill Christians and Muslims, kidnap women and children, and destroy churches and mosques. We will never forget the girls and boys kidnapped from Chibok last April, and I will never stop calling for their immediate and unconditional release."

As the UN reviewed its peace operations, including its peacekeeping missions and special political missions, he stressed that African troops remained vital to the UN's peacekeeping capacity. In that field, as in others, cooperation with African mechanisms would again be essential and he welcomed progress on the African Standby Force and the African capacity for crisis response.

Kutesa also called for strengthened cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations in Africa, pointing to the "tangible positive results" achieved so far. He said a thematic debate would be held in May on strengthening cooperation.

He also took up the issue of the threat of terrorism and extremism, stating the need to address it by promoting dialogue, tolerance and reconciliation.

"The recent terrorist attacks in Nigeria, Somalia, Kenya, Pakistan, France and elsewhere around the world are a stark reminder of the threat posed by groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda," he said. "We need collective action to defeat them."

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In addition, Kutesa said he was also prioritising reform of the Security Council to make it better reflect modern global realities.

"Today, the Security Council is one of the most undemocratic organs of the United Nations," he said. "My effort is to work towards text-based negotiations, within the Inter-Governmental process. The need for unity and cohesion of the African Group on this issue cannot be overemphasised."

The Secretary-General held a series of bilateral meetings with leaders attending the Summit, including Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma Chairperson of the African Union Commission. They discussed UN-AU cooperation and committed their two organizations to deepening their strategic partnership. The Secretary-General commended Dr. Dlamini-Zuma for her leadership of the AU Commission and her continuous efforts in seeking additional resources to support the work of the AU.

They exchanged views on the situations in a number of countries where the UN and AU are cooperating, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo/Great Lakes region, South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia and the Sahel. They also discussed the security threat posed by Boko Haram and the need to mobilize the international community even more on the regional response.

In his other talks, the UN chief met with Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, President of Somalia; Aminu Wali, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria; Michel Kafondo, Transitional President of Burkina Faso; Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of Ethiopia; Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of Equatorial Guinea; Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya; Mohamed Beji Caid Essebsi, President of Tunisia; and Edgar Lungu, President of Zambia.

Africa: AU Calls for Response to Continent's Threats

Source: Daily News (Tanzania)

31 January 2015 - THE African Union (AU) Ordinary Session of Heads of State and Government started in Addis Ababa yesterday with pleas to have coordinated and collective responses to the continent's threats.

Chairperson of the AU Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, named the threats as terrorism, modern slavery in the guise of human trafficking; poaching, illegal logging and fishing and the destruction and plunder of African natural resources.

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President Jakaya Kikwete arrived in Addis Ababa on Thursday evening ready for the session where African leaders also chose the continent's oldest head of state, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, as AU chairman for the coming year.

Mr Mugabe drew applause when he denounced colonialism. The chairperson started and ended her speech in Kiswahili which is spoken by various communities inhabiting the African Great Lakes region and other parts of Southeast Africa, including Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

"Terrorism, in particular the brutality of Boko Haram against our people, the senseless killings, the destruction of property, the enslavement and sale of our people, our girls kidnapped and married and the terrorisation of villages are a threat to our collective safety, security and development," she said.

This, along with the senseless killings of our people, has now spread beyond Nigeria to Cameroon, Chad and Niger and requires a response that is collective, effective and decisive to achieve the desired results, she added.

"As we discuss the situations in Somalia, Libya, Mali, South Sudan and DRC, we should remind ourselves that on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the OAU, we vowed that we shall not bequeathed war and violence to the next generation of Africans," she noted.

Dr Zuma went on to state that it is imperative that Africans deny space to those who are bent on destroying the lives and prospects of Africans.

"This will require concerted efforts to unite our people. The core of our solution rests in our ability to speedily champion tolerant, accountable, democratic and inclusive political cultures and inclusive social and economic development," she observed.

SA to host next AU summit

Source: SAPA

1 February 2015 - President Jacob Zuma led the South African delegation at the summit, where Zimbabwe was elected chair of the AU for the year, presidential spokesman Mac Maharaj said in a statement.

Zimbabwe would have the double responsibility of leading both the continent and the sub-region as chair of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

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Among the issues discussed at the summit were the escalation in terrorism in parts of Africa and the AU's co-ordinated response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

Zuma took part in the discussion on security, focusing on the situation in the Great Lakes Region, South Sudan and the threat posed by Boko Haram in Nigeria and the surrounding countries.

Zuma said the countries of the Lake Chad Basin (Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and Niger) had established a multinational force and sought endorsement from the AU.

The Security Council agreed to the establishment of this force and that requisite funding be provided, Zuma said.

A special meeting of the SADC took place on the margins of the summit to consider the current developments in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Great Lakes Region. The need to disarm "negative forces" in the region was also discussed at summit level.

In regard to South Sudan, Zuma stated that member states of the inter-governmental authority on development met on the sidelines of the AU summit in an attempt to finalise the agreement related to the modalities on how the government of South Sudan would be structured.

"A report on the situation in South Sudan will be presented to the AU peace and Security Council once negotiations, which are at a delicate stage at the moment, are concluded," Zuma said.

The summit also reviewed the progress made in addressing the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone). The summit reiterated the need to urgently establish the African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention this year, Zuma said.

Burundi Catholic Church calls for journalist's release

Source: AFP via news24.com

Bujumbura, 1 February 2015 - A senior member of Burundi's influential Catholic Church on Saturday called for the release of a radio station boss who has been arrested for complicity in the murder of three Italian nuns.

Bob Rugurika, director of the popular independent African Public Radio (RPA), was arrested in mid-January after broadcasting the purported confession of a man claiming he was one of the killers.

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The three Roman Catholic nuns, Lucia Pulici, 75, Bernadetta Boggian, 79 and Olga Raschiatti, 83, were murdered at a convent in Kamenge, north of the capital Bujumbura in September last year.

The purported confession contradicted a police account of the crime and implicated a top official.

Speaking on Catholic station Radio Maria, prominent cleric Pierre Antoine Madaraga said he was "hurt" by the arrest and said the report by RPA - which is close to the opposition and known for its crime reporting - should be followed up.

Police arrested a suspect two days after the crime and said he had owned up to the murders. They also presented the suspect as being mentally unstable.

"When RPA started to give us other information, we thought that finally there is another lead to follow," Madaraga said. "So putting RPA's director in prison is like wanting to silence the truth."

"I'm asking seriously that we free him so the truth can be told about the murder of the three sisters," he added.

For broadcasting the counter-confession and refusing to give up the self-proclaimed killer, Rugurika was charged with complicity in the murders, "breach of public solidarity" and disclosing confidential information regarding a case.

He faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

The man who made the radio claim said he was ordered to carry out the hits by three men he met in a bar belonging to former spy boss, Adolphe Nshimirimana. Nshimirimana, who now works in the presidency, is one of President Pierre Nkurunziza's top lieutenants.

The killing of the nuns caused shock in Burundi and Italy. Two were stabbed to death and the third decapitated.

Burundi, a small nation in Africa's Great Lakes region, emerged from 13 years of brutal civil war in 2006, but the political climate remains fractious ahead of presidential polls due in June.

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Burundi: l'opposition plutôt divisée après la réunion avec la Céni

Source: RFI

2 février 2015 - Est-ce la fin de la crise que traverse le Burundi depuis l'enrôlement des électeurs début décembre, entaché de nombreuses irrégularités ? Après avoir dit non pendant plusieurs semaines, la Commission électorale nationale indépendante (Céni) a finalement accédé à la demande de l'opposition burundaise en organisant une réunion d'évaluation du processus, jeudi et vendredi à Bujumbura, selon les conditions posées par l'opposition. Il y a eu des avancées comme le reconnaît la société civile, mais l'opposition en sort plutôt divisée.

31 janvier 2015 - Cette fois, l'opposition burundaise a obtenu ce qu'elle demandait depuis longtemps. Pendant deux jours, elle a exprimé ses inquiétudes et montré les irrégularités constatées pendant l'enrôlement des électeurs au cours d'une réunion dirigée, non plus par la Céni, mais par deux personnalités indépendantes.

Au final, pas de grands bouleversements comme le demandait l'opposition et la société civile du Burundi, mais de nombreuses mesures qui, mises bout à bout, devraient permettre de corriger le fichier électoral de ses nombreuses irrégularités.

Il s'agit notamment de la réouverture partielle de l'enrôlement, des commissions mixtes pour surveiller cet enrôlement et la distribution des cartes nationales d'identité et la publication de la liste électorale sur le site web de la Céni.

Le Rassemblement national pour le changement, l'une des deux grandes coalitions de l'opposition burundaise qui regroupe une dizaine de partis, se dit satisfait, même s'il reste prudent. Jean Minani : « Si la Céni suit toute ces recommandations sur lesquelles nous nous sommes entendu, il n'y a pas de raisons pour que les élections ne se fassent de manière transparente ».

Le président de la Céni lui ne cache pas sa joie. Pierre-Claver Ndayicariye explique la raison de ce qu'il considère comme un succès. « Qu'est-ce qui a changé ? Leur donner l'opportunité de s'exprimer, voilà la dimension psychologique qui a permis que les choses bougent dans un sens positif ».

Mais reste à convaincre la dizaine de partis de l'opposition radicale burundaise regroupée au sein de l'ADC-Ikibiri. Son président, Léonce Ngendakumana, parle carrément d'une « réunion qui est venue sceller l'échec du processus électoral burundais ».

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Un ancien chef rebelle historique annonce sa candidature à la présidentielle au Burundi

Source: PANAPRESS

1er février 2015 - Le leader historique, Léonard Nyangoma, sera dans la course pour l'élection présidentielle de juin prochain à la tête du conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie (Cndd), apprend-on des conclusions d'un congrès extraordinaire qu'a tenu samedi, cet ancien mouvement rebelle devenu aujourd'hui un parti politique de l'opposition radicale au Burundi.

Le prétendant à la magistrature suprême est l'un des vieux routier de la politique nationale. Il avait lancé un mouvement rebelle armé dans la foulée de l'assassinat, en 1993, du premier président démocratiquement élu, Melchior Ndadaye, dans un coup d'Etat militaire.

Son mouvement armé a connu des divisions internes qui ont débouché sur la création du Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie/forces de défense de la démocratie (Cndd-Fdd, au pouvoir depuis 2005, date des premières élections démocratiques post-conflit).

Les relations entre les deux partis du Cndd et du Cndd-Fdd ne sont jamais normalisées et l'ancien chef historique rebelle, Léonard Nyangoma, vit en exilé politique à l'étranger depuis les dernières élections générales de 2010.

La capacité de mobilisation et le talent d'orateur de cet ancien professeur de mathématiques avait été pour beaucoup, en 1993, dans la victoire et le pouvoir éphémère du Frodebu face à l'ancien parti unique de l'unité pour le progrès national (Uprona), disent ses anciens compagnons de lutte politique.

La candidature de M. Nyangoma est la troisième à avoir été jusqu'ici annoncée par l'opposition après celles de Alexis Sinduhije, président du Mouvement pour la Solidarité et la Démocratie (Msd), et de Léonce Ngendakumana, du Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi (Frodebu).

Du côté de la mouvance présidentielle, l'heure est plutôt aux tirs de barrage contre un « troisième mandat » supposé du chef de l'Etat sortant, Pierre Nkurunziza.

Une vingtaine d'organisations de la société civile a déjà lancé une campagne connue sous le mot d'ordre de « Halte à un troisième mandat du Président Nkurunziza » alors que le concerné n'a pas encore rien dit clairement de tel à ce sujet.

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Central African Republic Rejects Militias' Cease-Fire Accord

Source: VOA

Bangui, 2 February 2015 - The Central African Republic on Thursday rejected a cease-fire deal signed by rival militias that calls for amnesty for those responsible for more than a year of sectarian violence.

The talks, between a splinter group of the mainly Muslim Seleka alliance and a faction of the "anti-balaka" militia, were held in Kenya, outside the auspices of a government-led peace process in C.A.R.

The final draft of the accord called for a transitional government to be appointed to replace interim President Catherine Samba Panza's cabinet. It also said French forces deployed in C.A.R. should be put under the command of a U.N. peacekeeping mission.

"The government categorically rejects the Nairobi accord because it was not associated with the discussions in any way," Communications Minister Georges Adrien Poussou told Reuters. "It is not a real accord. Rather, it's a series of grievances from the two armed groups which hold the country hostage."

Thousands of people have died in the violence that has gripped C.A.R. since the Seleka seized power in March 2013. The group relinquished power last year in the face of a violent backlash by the anti-balaka but still controls the northeastern half of the landlocked country.

Former colonial power France, which deployed some 2,000 troops to C.A.R. to stem Christian-Muslim violence, also rejected the agreement. The French Foreign Ministry said the deal was an attempt to undermine a mediation process led by the transitional government, which is expected to lead to a forum in Bangui in March.

"That initiative has France's backing," the ministry said in a statement, adding that it was important to ensure the reconciliation process ended impunity and that all U.N. members should enforce sanctions adopted by the U.N. Security Council.

Despite the presence of the French forces and a U.N. peacekeeping mission, the interim government has been unable to assert its authority ahead of elections due later this year.

French military spokesman Colonel Gilles Jaron said that while the situation in C.A.R. was generally stable, there were tensions in the east, due largely to a widening split between a faction of Seleka who wished to enter the peace process and those who preferred to continue fighting.

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He said a majority of Seleka fighters would be represented at the upcoming talks in Bangui.

Uganda: Body of LRA Commander Possibly Found

Source: VOA

2 February 2015 - The Ugandan army said Monday it may have found the body of a Lord's Resistance Army commander wanted for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

A spokesman said that the army uncovered a grave believed to hold the remains of Okot Odhiambo, the deputy to LRA chief Joseph Kony.

The spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Paddy Akunda, said DNA tests are under way to help with identification.

Odhiambo is wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague on charges of murder, enslavement, attacking civilians, pillaging and forced enlistment of children.

The court issued a warrant for his arrest in 2005. Ugandan officials did not say where the body was found or when Odhiambo may have died.

Another LRA commander wanted by the ICC, Dominic Ongwen, surrendered in the Central African Republic last month and was transferred to court custody.

The LRA is accused of killing tens of thousands of people and kidnapping or maiming thousands more since launching an insurgency against the Ugandan government in the 1980s. In recent years, the group has become a roving threat in central Africa, with bands of fighters attacking villages in the C.A.R., Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan.

Ugandan forces, aided by U.S. military advisors, are leading a regional joint task force to track down the remaining fighters.