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Rwandan Rebels in DRC Army

By James Munyaneza

The government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) recruited in its military ranks members of Interahamwe militia from rebel outfit, the Forces for the Democratic Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), it has emerged. Sources in the eastern Congo as well as officials from the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) claim that a number of the Rwandan rebels had also been issued with Congolese national Identity Cards.

An RCD official, Muhire Ruti, was quoted by the BBC Tuesday as saying that some Interahamwe rebels had acquired the Identity Cards.

When contacted for comment, Rwandan Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Minister Dr Charles Murigande denied knowledge of the rebels' acquisition of the Congolese IDs. "I don't know if it is true," he said by telephone on Wednesday.

He also said he was unaware whether Kabila's government still supports Interahamwe/FDLR rebels. Majority of the militias are blamed for the 1994 Rwanda Genocide during which about one million ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred by members of extremist Hutus.

However, the Special Presidential Envoy to the Great Lakes Region, Ambassador Richard Sezibera, confirmed to The New Times on Wednesday that there are indeed reports about the existence of FDLR members in FARDC (Congolese armed forces). "We have had reports about the presence of Interahamwe in FARDC but we are working with the Congo government to address the issue," he said, adding that Kinshasa is cooperative over the matter.

He said that the matter would be handled through the existing joint verification mechanism between the two countries. "Now that there is an elected government in Congo, we hope our two teams will sort out the matter. That is an issue that has been addressed bilaterally."

Ex-DRC Rebels Excluded

Both Murigande and Sezibera were however, cagey when asked for comment on the set-up of the new Congolese Cabinet.

The RCD and the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC), both former rebel movements fighting against President Joseph Kabila's government, received no ministerial positions in the new Cabinet announced early this week.

"There is a legitimate government which has legitimacy to govern Congo the way it

promised (its electorate)," said Murigande and added: "I don't think we (Rwanda) have a right to comment on an elected government."

When asked the same question, Sezibera said: "We have no comment on the formation of the government in DRC. We welcome the new government; we will work with them on issues of mutual benefit."

Both the leaders of RCD and MLC, Azarius Ruberwa and Jean Pierre Bemba, respectively, lost to President Kabila during last year's multiparty elections, the first in four decades in the vast country. They were both vice presidents during the transitional government set up under a 2002 peace deal. Kabila named 81-year old Antoine Gizenga as the country's new prime minister after the latter backed Kabila's presidential bid during last October's run-off against Bemba.

Gizenga was a deputy prime minister in the government of the country's first post-independence leader, Patrice Lumumba.

The 60-member Cabinet also includes Nzanga Mobutu, son of former dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, who was toppled by Kabila's father, Laurent Kabila Nzanga Mobutu, who also supported Kabila after the former lost his presidential bid in the first election round, is the Agriculture minister and number two to Gizenga in protocol. Congo talks meanwhile, under a Rwandan brokered deal, the DRC is in the process of integrating the fighters of dissident General Laurent Nkunda into the national army. "They are talking and they agreed on several issues. We are happy with it," Sezibera said yesterday.

Murigande said Rwanda is currently not directly involved in the talks but added that it would assist if called upon. "Rwanda facilitated and the rest is between the two parties unless they come back for mediation."

Meanwhile, violence broke out last week in the eastern DRC between rival Banyamulenge officers, leaving several people dead and others displaced.

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