

INTERNATIONAL

Kenya's new strongman has failed to live up to promise

Special to Sentinel-Voice

NAIROBI, Kenya — What a difference a year hasn't made.

In May 1997, Rwanda backed the rebellion that ousted dictator Mobutu Sese Seko from power in neighboring Zaire.

The country's Tutsi leaders expected the new ruler to keep Hutu rebels away from their common border.

Fifteen months later, not much has changed. New leader Laurent Kabila has changed the name of Zaire to Congo, but hasn't kept his word. Violence continues.

From their bases in eastern Congo, Hutu rebels have stepped up their attacks against Rwandan targets, and Congolese authorities appear unable, or unwilling, to deal with them. So Rwanda has decided to do the job itself.

Last month, Kabila announced that he was sending home all the Rwandan soldiers

who helped him gain power. Rwanda said it had planned to pull them out anyway.

The pullout made a split between Kabila and his Rwandan Tutsi backers evident, and that was a signal to ethnic Tutsis in the Congolese army, known as Banyamulenge, to join forces with soldiers and officers from other tribes in eastern Congo to oust forces loyal to Kabila.

Other Banyamulenge and Rwandan troops rose against Kabila in the Congolese capital, Kinshasa, 800 miles to the west. Their goal is as yet unclear.

The current movement bears striking similarity to the early days of Kabila's uprising in October 1996, when the Banyamulenge in South Kivu province were the first to take up arms against Mobutu's troops. Rwanda was giving covert aid to Kabila, but did not acknowledge it publicly until a year later.

The rebellion in late 1996 succeeded in dispersing the estimated 100,000 Hutu rebels

mingled among more than a million Hutu refugees in camps in eastern Zaire, where they were re-arming to regain power in Rwanda.

Despite Kabila's victory — aided as well by Angola, Eritrea and Uganda — things did not work out the way the new Tutsi leaders in Rwanda had planned.

Kabila failed to stamp out the Hutu rebels. Most are remnants of the extremist Hutu army and militia responsible for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, in which at least half a million Tutsis were slaughtered.

The rebels still manage to receive weapons and supplies that must pass through northeastern Congo.

Since he assumed power in May 1997, Kabila has been confronted with an enormous and deeply divided nation suffering from decades of neglect. He faces a problem similar to that which contributed to Mobutu's downfall — no money to pay his army.

He also has been under pressure from his own Baluba kinsmen and the inhabitants of Kinshasa to reduce the influence of the Banyamulenge — and the Rwandans — who are seen as bossy foreigners.

Hutu rebel attacks on Rwanda, meanwhile, are increasing in intensity, creating a formidable obstacle to the government's recovery plans.

Since then, thousands have died in Hutu rebel attacks and army counterattacks — with no end in sight.

On Monday, as reports emerged of fighting among factions of the Congolese army and Banyamulenge and Rwandan troops in Kinshasa and eastern Kivu, rumors spread of a Rwandan-backed coup.

Rwanda officially denied any role in the events, but one officer, who asked not to be identified by name, has confirmed levels of Rwandan involvement.

Clinton spokesman says Laurent Kabila's record spotty

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON — The State Department credited Congo's President Laurent Kabila with some successes during his 15-month rule but also said there have been "significant setbacks" in human rights and other areas.

"Kabila's rule has been a mixed bag," department spokesman James P. Rubin said Tuesday. He noted that Kabila has released Congo's foremost opposition leader, Etienne Tshisekedi, and has set a schedule for elections.

On the other hand, Kabila denied access to U.N. human rights officials who had sought to investigate reports of massacres in eastern Congo, and he has not established a free and fair political environment, Rubin said. He added that Kabila has done little to revitalize the economy.

Rebels reportedly have taken several key towns in eastern Congo and hijacked a private plane. The government blames the disturbances on Rwandan soldiers.

Rubin implicitly raised concern about the possible breakup of

the country, saying the administration wants the government in Kinshasa to control the national territory.

"Let's bear in mind that it is in a strategic location," he said. "There are many important countries that border on it, and as goes the Congo, so might go the stability of some of the countries in the region."

He added: "We want to see the people there have a government that can help them thrive and prosper in a democratic way. Those are our objectives."

Southern Africa's land issue reaching boiling point

By Gumisai Mutume

Special to Sentinel-Voice

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (IPS) — While many believe the next war in Southern Africa will be over water, millions of people are waging a daily struggle for land rights.

When the Svosve community in eastern Zimbabwe recently descended upon a piece of commercial land to claim it as their own, they were waging such a battle.

So were the Makuleke in northern South Africa, who this year won a landmark decision after 18 months of negotiations

to control about 25,000 hectares of land in the Kruger National Park which they had lost through forced removals in 1968.

"Land tenure rights of people is an issue that is assuming greater significance in every African country and this issue will most certainly be a most burning one in the 21st century," said University of Zimbabwe lecturer Mandivamba Rukuni.

"The Southern African legacy can also be summed up in the lack of political wisdom or vision in terms of public policies, particularly for

agriculture and natural resource management," Rukuni told a regional conference on land held here last month.

The three-day conference, which began July 7 and was convened by the Southern African Development Community Natural Resources Management Program, looked at the role of tenurial arrangements in the sustainable use of natural resources.

Insecure land tenure rights, abuse of common property and resources, the disenfranchisement of rural people — especially women

— unemployment, poverty and the lack of economic development in rural areas are some of the problems resulting from the absence of clear-cut land issue strategies, conference attendants were told.

In Zimbabwe, President Robert Mugabe's land reform program has been sporadic and often incoherent, resulting in growing impatience among landless people like the Svosve.

The South African government, whose land issues are similar to Zimbabwe's, is battling to resettle the Black majority in a country where

more than 80 percent of prime land was reserved under apartheid for Whites, who only constitute 12 percent of the population.

Blacks were squeezed into communal settlements in marginal, drought-prone areas. More than 3.5 million people have been forcibly evicted from their original land.

Many Blacks living under such circumstances are concerned about not having legal rights to the land they live on.

The majority of Africans hold their land under indigenous customary land

tenure systems not recognized legally by their governments. Most governments designate such land as state-owned.

"People say this is my home, but some of them do not know that legally it is not theirs. The test is to try and sell it, which they find they cannot do," said Langford Chitsike of the Africa Resources Trust. "If you want to begin serious development on such a plot, banks want to know whether you have legal rights over it. It is therefore difficult to secure money for serious development."

Most of the wars of
(See Land, Page 15)

Mastermind of apartheid-era poison program testifies

Special to Sentinel-Voice

CAPE TOWN, South Africa — The mastermind of a chemical and biological weapons program praised the scientists who developed the deadly poisons in testimony last week before a panel investigating apartheid-era abuses.

Most of Dr. Wouter Basson's three hours before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was spent wrangling over whether he was obligated to testify.

Basson headed a government-sponsored factory that churned out food and drinks laced with deadly chemicals.

"This was an extensive project and very good work was done in this project," Basson said.

The poison was intended for government attacks on anti-apartheid activists, including Nelson Mandela, the South African president who was a political prisoner for 27 years under apartheid.

Basson has objected to giving testimony, saying it could prejudice his defense in an upcoming trial on charges ranging from drug possession to conspiracy to murder.

However, a judge ruled last Monday that Basson had to testify because evidence given at commission hearings cannot be used in criminal trials.

Basson appeared last Wednesday without his usual legal representation and argued that the hearings could not proceed without his lawyers. The panel's work ended Friday when its mandate expired.

Dumisa Ntsebeza, head of the commission's investigative unit, accused Basson of willfully delaying.

"Dr. Basson takes a very cavalier approach to these proceedings," he said.

The commission was set up in 1995, a year after all-race elections ended apartheid, and is charged with uncovering the truth about abuses by all sides in the fight against white rule.

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