



[Le ministère français des Affaires étrangères a salué lundi la signature d'un accord-cadre pour la paix dans la région des Grands Lacs, visant à pacifier l'est de la République démocratique du Congo (RDC), qui fait face depuis plusieurs années à la présence de groupes rebelles armés dans cette partie du pays. "La France salue la signature, le 24 février à Addis-Abeba (en Ethiopie), de l'accord-cadre de paix, de sécurité et de coopération pour la RDC et la région", a déclaré le porte-parole du quai d'Orsay, Philippe Lalliot. "Cet accord a été conclu sous les auspices des Nations unies, de l'Union africaine, de la Conférence internationale sur la région des Grands Lacs et de la Communauté de développement d'Afrique australe, qui seront garants de son application", a-t-il ajouté.]

BURUNDI :

Burundi : les journalistes se mobilisent de nouveau pour la libération d'Hassan Ruvakuki

Par RFI/mardi 26 février 2013

Les journalistes burundais ont prévu de manifester ce mardi 26 février à Bujumbura. Ils se mobilisent de nouveau pour réclamer la libération d'Hassan Ruvakuki. Le correspondant de RFI en swahili a vu sa peine à perpétuité pour des accusations de terrorisme ramenée à trois ans de prison. Les journalistes ont écrit directement au maire de la capitale pour l'avertir de cette manifestation, mais l' élu a interdit tout rassemblement. Le bras de fer entre les professionnels de l'information et les autorités burundaises semble bel et bien engagé.

Cette fois, chacun a annoncé d'avance la couleur. « Votre manifestation est illégale », écrit le maire de Bujumbura, Saïdi Juma, hier dans sa réponse aux principales organisations professionnelles des médias du Burundi. Et d'enfoncer le clou. Hassan Ruvakuki, dont la peine vient d'être ramenée à 3 ans de prison, ne s'est pas pourvu en cassation comme ses co-prévenus, ce qui aux yeux du premier

magistrat de la capitale burundaise signifie qu'il est « satisfait » par ce verdict.

Il appelle donc la police « à veiller au respect de l'ordre public », une injonction qui sonne sinistrement aux oreilles des journalistes burundais, déjà victimes d'une répression très dure il y a une semaine.

Mais la réponse des organisations des médias est tout aussi claire. Le président de l'Union burundaise des journalistes, Alexandre Niyungeko déclare : « Nous allons faire cette marche pacifiquement, peu importe que la police utilise les moyens qu'elle a utilisés la fois dernière. De toute façon, nous, notre force c'est une marche pacifique. On montrera à la face du monde que c'est la police qui est entrain de violer les libertés des personnes ».

Tout cela se passe sous l'œil attentif de la communauté internationale. De passage à Bujumbura vendredi, le commissaire européen au développement, Andris Peibalgs, s'est dit « choqué » par cette violence policière et a mis en garde contre un nouveau déchaînement policier contre les journalistes aujourd'hui.

RWANDA :

RDC CONGO :

Signature à Addis-Abeba d'un accord pour ramener la paix dans l'Est de la RDC

25 février, 2013/radiookapi.net

Onze pays africains ont finalement signé dimanche 24 février 2013 à Addis-Abeba en Ethiopie, un accord cadre pour restaurer la paix dans l'Est de la RDC. Devant les facilitateurs des Nations unies et de l'Union africaine, les pays signataires de ce document se sont engagés pour un retour de la paix dans l'Est de la RDC, et dans toute la région.

Prenant la parole après la signature de cet accord, le secrétaire général des nations unies, Ban Ki Moon, également signataire en tant que garant de la bonne application de ce texte, a « espéré que cet accord mènera à une ère de paix et de stabilité pour les peuples de la RDC et de la région ». Mais Ban Ki-Moon a ajouté « qu'il ne s'agit que du début d'une approche globale qui nécessitera un engagement soutenu » des pays de la région, pour apaiser cette zone mise à mal par de nombreuses rébellions. Il a rappelé l'engagement du gouvernement congolais à mener des réformes internes.

Selon le chef du département des opérations de maintien de la paix aux Nations unies, Hervé Ladsous, un mécanisme d'évaluation de l'application de cet accord sera mis en place, laquelle évaluation se fera de façon régulière.

Le président congolais Joseph Kabila espère que l'accord signé contribuera à mettre fin à l'insécurité dans l'Est du pays. Il a lancé un appel à ses pairs des pays des grands lacs à faire asseoir la logique de la force de la loi pour garantir la paix dans la région.

Même sentiment de satisfaction partagé par le président rwandais, Paul Kagame a pour sa part

assuré « approuver sans réserve » cet accord d'Addis-Abeba, car selon lui, rien ne peut davantage bénéficier au Rwanda qu'une avancée réelle vers la paix régionale et la stabilité.

De son côté, le secrétaire générale de la conférence internationale pour la région des grands lacs, le Congolais Alphonse Ntumba Luaba affirme que l'accord ouvre la voie à une nouvelle étape, celle du déploiement prochain, d'une force d'imposition de la paix à l'est de la RD Congo.

Le ministre belge des Affaires étrangères, Didier Reynders, a estimé pour sa part que «cet accord constitue une excellente base de travail pour relancer les efforts communs de la RDC, de la Région et de la Communauté internationale envers une solution durable à la crise dans l'Est congolais ».

RDC Congo : des affrontements font 10 morts, l'ONU inquiète

Le Monde.fr avec AFP/ 25.02.2013

Des incidents armés ont opposé dimanche soir des factions rivales du mouvement M23 et fait dix morts parmi les rebelles dans le Rutshuru, dans le nord-est de la République démocratique du Congo (RDC), ont indiqué des sources hospitalières lundi 25 février à Rutshuru.

L'hôpital provincial de Rutshuru a précisé que les corps de 10 personnes avaient été dénombrés et que deux blessés avaient été hospitalisés. Ces heurts, selon une source militaire occidentale, sont liés à des divergences au sein du mouvement rebelle, notamment à la suite de l'accord-cadre qui a été signé dimanche à Addis Abeba pour garantir la paix dans cette région.

LES DISCUSSIONS PIÉTINENT

Ils ont opposé des partisans du général Sultani Makenga, chef militaire du M23, à ceux de Jean-Marie Runiga, chef politique. Ce dernier aurait déjà, il y a plusieurs jours, annoncé son intention de reprendre la lutte armée alors que les discussions ouvertes à Kampala entre Kinshasa et le M23 piétinent.

Makenga s'y serait opposé et les deux hommes sont allés s'en expliquer à Kigali en milieu de semaine, selon une source occidentale à Goma. A leur retour, Runiga a été placé en résidence surveillée à Bunagana, ville frontière entre la RDC et l'Ouganda, d'après la même source.

Dimanche, alors que 11 chefs d'Etat, dont les présidents rwandais Paul Kagame et congolais Joseph Kabila, étaient à Addis Abeba pour signer l'accord-cadre sous le regard attentif du secrétaire général des Nations unies, Ban Ki-moon, Jean-Marie Runiga a décidé de rejoindre Rutshuru.

A son arrivée dans cette ville, située dans le sud de la zone contrôlée par le M23, ses soldats se sont affrontés avec ceux de Makenga, selon une commerçante locale. D'importants mouvements de population ont été signalés, notamment à Bunagana, où des centaines de personnes se sont réfugiées en Ouganda.

"LA SITUATION GÉNÉRALE EST VOLATILE ET PRÉCAIRE"

Le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU a fait part de sa profonde inquiétude devant l'aggravation des troubles dans l'est du pays. Les quinze membres du Conseil de sécurité, parmi lesquels figure le Rwanda, a renouvelé sa condamnation des rebelles du Mouvement du 23 mars (M23), qui s'est emparé de territoires à l'est du Congo et qui est particulièrement visé par cet accord, dont la RDC est signataire.

Le Rwanda et l'Ouganda, signataires également du nouvel accord, ont été accusés par des experts de l'ONU de soutenir le M23 qui a déclenché une offensive contre le gouvernement de Kinshasa l'année dernière. Le Conseil de sécurité salue l'accord négocié par le secrétaire général de l'ONU Ban Ki-moon, mais reste "profondément inquiet de l'aggravation de la situation sécuritaire et humanitaire" dans cette région riche en minerais. Les membres du Conseil "réitèrent leur demande au M23 pour qu'il cesse immédiatement ses tentatives d'établir une administration parallèle illégitime", poursuit le communiqué.

L'accord pourrait également permettre la mise en place d'une "brigade d'intervention" spéciale de l'ONU dans l'est de la RDC, ainsi que la nomination d'un envoyé spécial de l'ONU pour la région des Grands Lacs. Le Conseil de sécurité a également demandé que le M23, la rébellion rwandaise hutue (FDLR), dont des membres sont soupçonnés de participation au génocide de 1994 contre les Tutsi, qui a fait 800 000 morts, selon l'ONU, ainsi que d'autres groupes armés "mettent fin à toute forme de violence et d'activités déstabilisatrices".

Le chef de la mission de l'ONU en RDC, Roger Meece, a prévenu vendredi qu'un conflit sérieux pourrait exploser à tout moment. "La situation générale est volatile et précaire et pourrait se transformer à tout moment en un conflit à grande échelle, sans alerte préliminaire, si tant est qu'il y en ait une", a déclaré M. Meece au Conseil de sécurité.

UGANDA :

China-Uganda friendship association launched

Date: Feb 25, 2013/By Vision Reporter

The Vice President Edward Kiwanuka Ssekandi has hailed relations between China and Uganda and called upon Ugandan business persons, academicians and cultural entities to take advantage of.

Ssekandi said that China was among the first countries to recognize Uganda as a sovereign State just three days after attaining her independence from the British becoming Uganda's friend and ally.

Ssekandi who presided over the launch of the China-Africa Friendship Association at Hotel Africana in Kampala said friendship between the two countries has since grown into a successful and fruitful relationship in the 50 years of interaction as nations and peoples.

He said it had become a source of motivation and trust in strengthening relations between the two countries at the Government level and had contributed to stronger socio-economic ties between the two peoples.

Ssekandi said there are over 7,000 Chinese living and operating over 100 businesses in Kampala alone and a reasonable number of Ugandans living and trading in various cities of China. He called upon Ugandans to use the association to do business with the Chinese as partners.

The Vice President described the launch as a significant block which has been added to the 50-year old bilateral relations between Uganda and China

He said it is now the Government's wish to ensure that the coming years are characterized by increased balance of trade between China and Uganda as well as technological and scientific transfer from China to Uganda and cultural exchanges to contribute to Uganda's development.

He commended the efforts of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, the Chinese Africa People's Association and Wenzhou Enterprise Chamber of Commerce of Beijing for playing a key role towards the birth of CAFAU.

He challenged the China - Africa Association to attract investment by presenting Uganda's potential regarding available business opportunities describing the launch as another milestone in Uganda's 50 years and commended members of the association for their noble vision of cementing the social, cultural and economic ties between the two peoples.

The Chinese Ambassador to Uganda Zhao Ya Li assured Ugandans of continued socio economic, cultural and bilateral relations between the two countries saying China holds Uganda in high esteem for her contribution to the peace and security on the continent.

The ceremony was also attended by the Minister for Tourism and wildlife Maria Mutagamba, State Ministers for Privatization Aston Kajara, office of Vice President Vincent Nyanzi and Uganda's Ambassador to China Charles Wagidoso Madibo, several Ugandan and Chinese traders.

SOUTH AFRICA :

South Africa: Will Pistorius Train While on Bail?

By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA and RAF CASERT Associated Press/(AP)/February 25, 2013

JOHANNESBURG

Oscar Pistorius on Monday informed South African authorities that he wants to resume athletic training while on bail for the murder case against him, a government official said.

A spokeswoman for the Olympic runner, however, denied that he was making immediate plans to return to the track while awaiting trial for the Feb. 14 shooting death of his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp.

"Absolutely not," said spokeswoman Janine Hills. "He is currently in mourning and his focus is not on his sports."

The double-amputee Paralympian discussed bail terms with his probation officer and a correctional official at the Pretoria Magistrate's Court in the capital, according to correctional officials. The guidelines will determine his daily routine until his next court appearance on June 4.

"It's his wish to continue to practice," James Smalberger, chief deputy commissioner of the department of correctional services, said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

Smalberger said the issue came up because authorities need to know his movements whenever he leaves the home where he is staying.

The timing of any resumption of training was uncertain.

Pistorius' longtime coach, Ampie Louw, declined to comment on any training plans for the runner, referring questions to a spokeswoman for the athlete's family.

Louw had said when the runner was in detention that he wanted to put him back into training in the event that he was granted bail. But he had also said Pistorius could be "heartbroken" and unwilling to immediately run again.

Pistorius, who was released on bail Friday, is staying at the house of his uncle, Arnold, in the affluent suburb of Waterkloof in Pretoria. He faces life imprisonment if convicted.

Pistorius is charged with premeditated murder in the killing of Steenkamp, in the early hours of Valentine's Day. Prosecutors say the pair had an argument before Steenkamp was killed; Pistorius says he mistook her for an intruder and shot her accidentally.

Smalberger said officials will visit Pistorius at his uncle's home at least four times a month, and that the runner indicated his interest in training again. More planning must occur before the start of any training.

"We want a training program from his coach so that we have backup for his movements," Smalberger said.

"He's not under house arrest, but his movements need to be known to us so that we don't pitch there and he's not there," he said. "We agree on 'free time' normally during the course of the day, and in the evening we expect him to be home."

Pistorius' 2013 season had been geared towards the Aug. 10-18 World Championships in Moscow, where the South African 4x400 relay team will be trying for another medal to add to the silver it won at the 2011 edition.

Chief Magistrate Desmond Nair had set bail at 1 million rand (\$113,000). The 26-year-old track star was also ordered to hand over his passports, turn in any guns he owns and keep away from his upscale home in a gated community in Pretoria, the scene of the crime.

He cannot leave the district of Pretoria without his probation officer's permission and is not allowed to consume drugs or alcohol, the magistrate said.

Business looks to Gordhan's Budget

26 February 2013/Source: SAnews.gov.za

Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan's Budget speech should send a signal to the world that South Africa is a stable and growing economy, while also giving information on how the country's infrastructure projects will be funded, says the South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Sacci).

Gordhan will deliver his Budget speech in Parliament in Cape Town at 2pm on Wednesday.

Infrastructure funding

Sacci chief executive officer Neren Rau said on Friday that the Budget should adopt a pragmatic approach towards the management of South Africa's public finances - and provide information on how the 18 major strategic infrastructure projects (SIPs) identified by the government last year will be funded.

The Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission (PICC) has launched the intergovernmental forums of the 18 SIPs.

The massive state-led infrastructure programme aims to turn the country into a construction site. Economic Development Minister Ebrahim Patel said last week that the programme already provides jobs to more than 150 000 people across the country.

Rau said business also hoped that Gordhan would give details on the funding of the National Health Insurance (NHI), which will be rolled out from this year, as well as speak to the implementation of the youth employment incentive scheme.

In his State of the Nation Address earlier this month, President Jacob Zuma spoke of a study into taxation that was being undertaken by the National Treasury. Rau said Gordhan should expand on this.

The issue of under-spending, overspending and misspending by government departments and municipalities should also be addressed, Rau added.

'Difficult balancing act'

In its commentary ahead of the Budget, Nedbank said Gordhan faced the difficult task of keeping the country's public finances on a sustainable path in an environment of faltering economic growth coupled with growing social spending demands.

"The National Budget offers the opportunity to set a clear path to deficit reduction through a sustainable combination of realistic revenue and expenditure proposals," the bank said.

In October last year, National Treasury indicated that the country's budget deficit was expected to widen from 4.2% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2011/12 to 4.8% in 2012/13 before falling to 4.5% in 2013/14 and narrowing to 3.1% by 2015/16.

The focus of the Budget was likely to remain on spending on social and economic infrastructure, the bank said.

"The aim [would be on] lifting the constraints of economic growth, reducing unemployment and improving the country's competitiveness in line with the National Development Plan."

The National Development Plan (NDP) is a blueprint for eliminating poverty and reducing inequality by 2030. According to the plan, South Africa can realise these goals by drawing on the energies of its people, growing an inclusive economy, building capabilities, enhancing the capacity of the state, and promoting leadership and partnerships throughout society.

According to Nedbank, personal income tax relief would be limited in this year's Budget, with lower- to middle-income earners likely to receive the bulk of the relief. Additionally, company tax relief was likely to be limited, with the company tax rate expected to remain unchanged at 28%.

Broadening the country's tax base

Rau said that business would like Gordhan to engage stakeholders on strategies to broaden the country's tax base so as to reduce dependence on a relatively small number of taxpayers, given the call for levies to be placed on high-income earners.

Meanwhile, the South African Institute of Professional Accountants (SAIPA) said that the Budget Speech was likely to show the strains of maintaining a balance between a sound fiscus and developmental needs.

Chairperson of the national tax and Sars stakeholders committees at the SAIPA, Ettiene Retief, said that former Finance Minister Trevor Manuel and the current minister had shown "great skill" in keeping the country on a sound financial footing while creating a developmental state.

"But this balancing act is becoming harder to maintain with each budget. We have too few taxpayers supporting too many grant recipients," he said, adding that this was unsustainable.

"The answer, as the minister has repeatedly noted, is to increase the tax base by growing the economy and expanding the tax base. It is thus imperative that the Budget focuses on enabling job creation," Retief said.

TANZANIA :

Tanzania: Insecurity Threatening Dar es Salaam's Tourism Industry

By Abduel Elinaza/Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)/26 February 2013

INSECURITY is seen as a threat to tourism in the country, the sector with huge potential as the leading employer and foreign exchange earner.

Stakeholders have it that few, if any, other business sectors have the potential to boost the economy significantly and its inclusive nature in improving living conditions.

This is because tourism, unlike mining, is not a primary export item but a final good where all value addition have been done. "This means that the value added in final stages of production is done in Tanzania," the Tanzania Association of Tour Operators (TATO) Executive Secretary, Mr Mustapha Akunaay, said.

Going by the 2009 statistics, the sector accounts for 17.5 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and supports about 500,000 direct employments and over 800,000 indirect. In South Africa every other tourist arrival creates five jobs.

They argued that the tourism industry brought in 1.4 billion US dollars (about 2.16tri/-) after arrival of 867,994 international tourists during the year 2012, which made the sector the second in foreign exchange revenue generation after gold.

"(However), there are many other countries with appealing attractions competing for tourism dollars, so there is no room for complacency," Mr Akunaay warned. In that vein, insecurity and poor safety for international travellers threaten the industry amid absence of the common law and regulations guiding the sector.

The stakeholders, who met in Dar es Salaam, last week, were told if a tourist is hurt it takes a considerable time to clear the bad label. TATO raised fear and urged the government to take a deliberate step to protect foreigners and tourists to boost the travellers' inflow because the sector is currently faced with undeniable challenge of security and safety.

"To repair the damage takes ages,(because) without security even best marketing efforts will fail," Mr Akunaay told about 50 stakeholders gathered to put final touches on new tourism policy and law. The new policy geared to support creation of special judicial system for cases relating to international travellers and separate police unit for tourists and diplomats.

TATO conducted two studies financed by BEST-AC on the 'impact of Crime on Tourism in Tanzania' and Review of Legal Framework on Safety and Security for Tourism in Tanzania 2012. The findings proposed two actions: review of the laws, policies and regulations pertaining to security system and introducing special police unit to cater for special groups -- like diplomats, foreigners, tourists or travellers.

"Safety and securities are vital to providing quality tourism and in tandem to this, the government should address the two recommendations, TATO Chairman Mr Leopold Kabendera told the forum. He said though there are no supporting data, tourism is creating many employment, for instance for every other tourist arrival in South Africa five jobs are created.

"I think the situation is close to Tanzania as well," the Chairman said. The government, on the other hand, has already heeded the introduction of the special police unit for tourists, late last year and 60 police are under the department but financial resources remain a key challenge issue.

"At the moment a 60-member police team patrol the streets on foot, in a move which defeated the unit's required goal... on top of that we are looking for 80m/- for an orientation course for another 240 in the next budget," the Unit Commander, ACP Mr Benedict Kitalika, said.

He said the squad lacks proper gear to institute the required safety and security for its personnel. So far the unit has prepared special uniforms for the unit that are easily identified. The police are pulled from the current workforce but are given an orientation training on how to handle the tourists.

Tanzania: Dar es Salaam Not Affected By Barclays, Absa Deal

By Abduel Elinaza/Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)/26 February 2013

THE Barclays Africa deal to take over South Africa's Absa Group has sailed through a crucial moment after the latter minority shareholders overwhelmingly voted 96 per cent in favour of the transaction.

Despite the takeover deal approval, Barclays Bank Tanzania and National Bank of Commerce (NBC) would operate as two separate and independent entities.

The Absa's shareholders did not only okay the takeover deal but also approved the change of name of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE)-listed entity from 'Absa Group Limited' to 'Barclays Africa Group Limited' to reflect the enlarged nature of the business.

According to the Barclays Tanzania (BBT), the change of name would take effect once the transaction closes, which is expected in the first half of this year, subject to the required regulatory approvals and fulfilment of other conditions precedent.

"In respect of Tanzania, the proposed strategic combination of the majority of Barclays Africa operations with Absa will only include Barclays Bank Tanzania," BBT said in a release yesterday. The release added: "Absa Group Limited's majority interest in National Bank of Commerce (NBC) will be maintained".

This means that BBT and NBC will continue to operate as two separate and independent entities, with separate boards and management teams. Absa Group Chief Executive Maria Ramos said after the shareholders vote: "This is an exciting and transformational deal that will create a high-quality franchise in Africa with a leading network of more than 1,300 outlets and 10,400 ATMs across ten countries.

"The vote of confidence from Absa's independent shareholders today is an important milestone in our journey towards becoming the 'Go-To' bank across Africa." The combined, JSE-listed business will serve approximately 14.4 million customers and employ around 43,000 people across ten countries.

Absa Group, listed on the JSE Limited, is one of South Africa's largest financial services groups offering a complete range of banking, insurance and wealth management products and services. The group's business is conducted primarily in South Africa.

It also has equity holdings in banks in Mozambique and Tanzania, representative offices in Namibia and Nigeria and Bancassurance operations in Botswana and Mozambique. At December 31, 2012, the Group had 718.2 million shares in issue and a market capitalisation of R117.79 billion (about 22.497tr/-).

KENYA :

Anxiety Over Instability Clouds Kenya Vote

By PATRICK MCGROARTY/online.wsj.com/February 25, 2013

Businesses Fear Disputed Outcome of Presidential Race, Repeat of Postelection Violence in East Africa's Largest Economy

Investor anxiety is taking a toll on Kenya as East Africa's largest economy prepares for Monday's elections.

The country has emerged as a beachhead for foreign direct investment on the continent, and the African home for many multinationals. General Electric Co. GE -2.48% International Business Machines Corp., IBM -1.78% Standard Chartered STAN.LN +1.49% PLC and Google Inc. GOOG -1.12% have all expanded offices in Nairobi recently.

But hovering over an otherwise bright regional outlook is an ominous unknown: whether Kenya can hold together through another contentious vote.

The answer could determine whether Kenya's economy meets projections of close-to-6% growth over each of the next two years, driving expansion across the region, or falters amid political instability—and pulls its neighbors down, too.

Some, like Uganda and Tanzania, are growing at even faster rates. But they are also less developed, and lean on trade, investment and expertise from Kenya, the regional giant.

"There's a significant risk of violence and a disputed outcome, which is worrying for lots of reasons, not least of which is the economic uncertainty that would hit Kenya and markets here," said Cedric Barnes, Horn of Africa project director for the International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based

anticonflict group.

Businesses fear a reprisal of the spasms of ethnic violence that followed the 2007 election, leaving hundreds of people dead and several hundred thousand displaced from their homes. In 2008, as violence peaked, growth crashed to 1.5%, from 7% the year before.

Those jitters are weighing on Kenya's currency. The shilling has shed almost 5% of its value against the U.S. dollar over the past eight months as businesses stockpiled foreign currency. The depreciation would have been even sharper, economists said, had Kenya's central bank not spent some \$440 million this year to prop up the shilling.

Representatives for GE, IBM, Standard Chartered and Google all said they aren't pulling back or reconsidering their investments ahead of the vote. "We're not doing anything unusual. We hope for a peaceful election," said Deo Onyango, GE's commercial growth director for East Africa.

But some Kenyan manufacturers are delaying investments in new plants and machinery until after the election, said Rajal Upadhyaya, managing director of Catalyst Principal Partners, a Nairobi private-equity fund.

Others have pooled \$5 million through the Kenya Private Sector Alliance business association to buy nonpartisan newspaper ads, sponsor soccer tournaments, and host events promoting a fair and peaceful vote.

"In the last postelection violence, the private sector lost employees, goods couldn't move, property was stolen and destroyed," said Carole Kariuki, the alliance's chief executive. "We saw a lot of the tensions hadn't been resolved, so we wanted to take an active role rather than waiting for the fallout."

Kenya's electoral commission says it has registered about 70% of 21 million eligible voters using new biometric-identification kits that will identify voters by their fingerprints. On Election Day, voters will be selecting more officials, at more polling stations, than ever before. New local assemblies and county governorships have come into existence under a new constitution ratified in 2010.

Although the constitution aims to quell ethnic tensions—in part by transferring some authority to local governments from the presidency—many critics complain the changes don't go far enough. One of the biggest concerns is that some of the top presidential candidates are the same people accused of stoking violence during the previous vote.

In December 2007, supporters of Raila Odinga rioted after President Mwai Kibaki was declared to have won a second term. Their anger spread and splintered along ethnic lines. The attacks involved members of Mr. Kibaki's Kikuyu tribe and reprisals from Mr. Odinga's Luo tribe and other groups.

Uhuru Kenyatta, the 51-year-old son of Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, allegedly organized squads of Kikuyu supporters to embark on a wave of retaliatory killings. Last year, the International Criminal Court indicted him for crimes against humanity.

Today, Mr. Kenyatta is deputy prime minister—and a top presidential candidate who is running virtually even with Mr. Odinga, according to a poll released on Friday by market-research firm Ipsos Synovate.

The charges against Mr. Kenyatta mean that if he is elected, the leader of a critical U.S. ally in a

turbulent region might be shuttling between managing East Africa's biggest economy and defending himself at The Hague.

Mr. Kenyatta vows the proceedings won't distract him.

"If the people of Kenya do decide to vote for me as their president I will be able to handle the issue of clearing my name while at the same time ensuring that the business of government continues," Mr. Kenyatta said in a presidential debate this month.

Still, his opponents capitalized on the awkward prospect of Kenya's president making regular trips to The Hague.

"I know that it will pose serious challenges to run a government by Skype," said Mr. Odinga, who is prime minister and a leading presidential candidate. (Mr. Kibaki is stepping down after reaching the two-term limit.)

Such uncertainty is a challenge to businesses in Kenya, too. If Mr. Kenyatta is elected and stops cooperating with the ICC, as many analysts worry he might, Kenya could face sanctions from the European Union and other governments. Such steps would make it difficult for businesses to keep up relationships with suppliers and investors abroad.

"There's a level of apprehension given what happened in 2007-2008," said Japh Olende, the Nairobi-based head of East Africa for insurer American International Group Inc. AIG -3.62%

Each Friday afternoon leading up to the vote, Mr. Olende has led AIG employees in singing Kenya's national anthem, a small attempt to promote solidarity. He said he isn't sure such modest gestures will add up to a more peaceful vote.

"This is a wait-and-see situation," he said.

Kenya's poll candidates in final debate

2013-02-26/- AFP

Nairobi - Kenya's eight presidential candidates were challenged on tough issues like land reform and corruption Monday in the final round of the country's first ever face-to-face debate ahead of elections next week.

The poll comes five years after the last vote in 2007-8 ended in bloody violence that claimed at least 1 100 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

While two main candidates - Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga - dominate the race for the March 4 election, all the hopefuls have potential influence, especially if voting goes to a second round run-off.

Kenyatta, the deputy prime minister and son of Kenya's founding president, faces trial with his running mate William Ruto at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for their alleged roles in orchestrating murder, rape and violence after the 2007 poll.

On Monday, Kenyatta, Odinga and the remaining six candidates were grilled in a sometimes emotive debate on the economy, labour laws and land reform - key issues that affect the daily lives of Kenyans.

Land, a cause of bloody ethnic confrontations in the country's volatile coastal region and the expansive Rift Valley, elicited the most reaction.

Kenyatta's family is one of Kenya's largest landowners - up to 500 000 according to rights groups.

He insisted on Monday that all was acquired legally.

"Nobody has ever pointed out and said I have been involved in improperly acquiring land. What we as a family have, has been acquired on a willing buyer willing seller basis," said Kenyatta.

Past economic scams

He declined to divulge exactly how much land the family owned overall, but said it amounted to at least 30 000 acres in Kenya's coastal region alone.

"You cannot allow a hyena to protect your goats," challenger Odinga quipped in response.

The other contenders are Martha Karua, Peter Kenneth, James Ole Kiyapi, Paul Muite, Musalia Mudavadi and high school teacher Mohamed Abduba Dida.

All candidates were quizzed on past economic scams and said they had either never been charged or had been cleared by official investigations.

Kenyans head to the polls next Monday to elect their president and other senior representatives including a governor, a senator, county representatives and members of parliament.

The first round of the historic face-to-face debates were held two weeks ago.

In a joint rally on Sunday, Kenyatta and Odinga, who claims he was robbed of victory in the 2007 vote, called for peaceful elections this time round.

Odinga was on the other side of the political divide five years ago and escaped indictment by the ICC, but a minister and a journalist who supported him also face charges of crimes against humanity.

– AFP

UK business fears over Kenya vote

Monday 25 February 2013/independent.co.uk

The coming elections in Kenya are causing major consternation in London amid fear that the outcome may unravel key British strategy in east Africa.

Uhuru Kenyatta, the candidate running neck and neck with his main opponent in the polls, has been indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity – and the UK's position is that it will have nothing but the most "essential" contact with someone in that position. Mr Kenyatta is accused of orchestrating the violence which left 1,300 people dead during the last elections in 2007.

Britain's close links with Kenya on anti-terrorist operations, military affairs, trade and aid

distribution has been the subject of a series of Whitehall cross-departmental meetings, to try to decide what action to take should Mr Kenyatta win, The Independent understands.

The UK has a longstanding military training base in Kenya, visited by 10,000 UK personnel a year, and Kenya is also a regional trade hub for UK businesses.

Kenya: This Is What We Will Do for You

By Margaret Wahito/Capital FM (Nairobi)/25 February 2013

Nairobi — "I will aim to ensure that every Kenyan lives in a permanent stone house; two or three bedroom, with light, water and toilet inside," was Safina's party presidential candidate Paul Muite's promise to Kenyans if elected as the next president as he gave his final word during the second presidential debate on Monday.

With only six days left for Kenyans to go to the ballot, the eight candidates promised to improve the lives of Kenyans with much focus being on implementation of the Constitution, fighting poverty through job creation, education and a renewed war on graft.

"I would first of all do a forensic audit on our real debt, because I believe there is genuine and bogus debt. I would focus on economic, social policies that would uplift the lives of the majority of the Kenyan people," added Muite.

CORD alliance flag-bearer Prime Minister Raila Odinga told Kenyans to vote him as the next president of the republic of Kenya to bring reforms that will spur economic growth.

Odinga believes that he is experienced since he has been in leadership for long and understands some of the key challenges that ail the Kenyan people.

"We should deal with the issues of wastage of resources, food production, infrastructure, issues of bureaucracy and corruption to create a much more efficient economy. My running mate and I are best fitted," Odinga pleaded with Kenyans.

Narc-Kenya candidate Martha Karua insisted that Kenyans deserve her leadership because she would fight corruption which has had adverse impact on the country's development.

"I look at my grandchild, I see unlimited hope and unlimited potential. This is the dream of every parent and every grandparent. This country needs you and me; a committed strong and firm leadership," emphasised Karua, who is the only female presidential candidate.

United Democratic Forum candidate Musalia Mudavadi said most of the contenders had made pledges which they could not deliver, pleading with Kenyans to vote for him instead as he was different.

"Many commitments are being put on the table but the financing end part of it is not articulated. I will provide a realistic agenda where the private sector and the Kenyans are fully included," Mudavadi promised.

Eagle alliance flag bearer Peter Kenneth and Restore and Build Kenya (RBK) candidate James ole Kiyiapi believe that the country would change if only Kenyans voted a fresh breed of leaders.

"The world has changed; the old ways will not do it. Only a new order and transformational

leadership," Kenneth said.

Their sentiments were supported by Mohamed Abduba Dida, who is vying for the seat on an Alliance for Real Change ticket.

"I want to apologise to all Kenyans for bad governance, what leaders have done for that long. We have a God who cares for all of us; consult your God for the right decision," Dida advised.

This entry was posted in Kenya, Kenya Poll Watch, Top stories on February 25, 2013 by MARGARET WAHITO.

About MARGARET WAHITO

Margaret has been a business reporter for the past three years. She is currently pursuing a degree in Communications and Public Relations at Moi University. She holds a diploma in film and video production from the Kenya institute of Mass Communications. Apart from journalism, she has interest in community work, especially helping the disadvantaged.

ANGOLA :

Angola: Serbia Wants to Improve Relations

25 February 2013/AngolaPress

Luanda — Serbia Minister of Defence, Aleksander Vucic, on Monday here expressed the intention of his Government to keep and improve the co-operation relations with Angola in all domains, Angop has learnt.

The Serbian official who is paying a three-day visit to Angola, said so when speaking at the opening of the official talks between Governmental delegations of both countries.

"We currently are ready to participate in the boosting and reinforce our co-operation relations in the domain of defense and others area", he said.

The official said Serbia will show all the responsibility, seriousness and dedication in reinforcing and advance the co-operation with Angola.

The visiting official will be received in an audience by the President of the Republic, José Eduardo dos Santos.

Angola: Publisher Commends Cuba's Organisational Level

25 February 2013/AngolaPress

Havana — The chairman of the Chá de Caxinde Cultural and Recreational Association, Jacques do Santos, on Sunday in the Cuban capital stressed that the International Book Fair of Havana was an absolute success and showed how the Cuban State is effectively concerned about reading habits.

Speaking to the press, the writer admitted that he was impressed with the high number of people who visited the fair at the São Pedro de La Cabana Fortress.

The book fair, which closed on Sunday, will continue in the other Cuban provinces until March 10.

To Jacques dos Santos, the Havana book fair is unique and owes nothing to similar events organised in more industrialised countries.

"I was surprised at the organizational level of Cubans, because to organise a fair with such dimension demands having some experience and capacity of invention and creativeness. What impressed me the most was the number of people getting close to books", he recognized.

He said he was taking to Angola several ideas about how to improve and spread the book fairs in Angola, because much has still to be done to stimulate the Angolan youths to like reading.

"It is effectively possible to take this experience to Angola and try to change the direction of things, because it is necessary that Angolan youths and children get close to books, so that they can gain capacities and be able to become people with value", emphasised the publisher.

Angola: Extradition Accord Comes Into Force Soon

25 February 2013/AngolaPress

Luanda — A co-operation protocol signed recently between Angola and Portugal, related to extradition of national citizens of both countries, will come into force soon, says the Justice and Human Rights minister, Rui Manguiera.

The official said so when making an assessment of the activities at the Ministry, since October 01, 2012.

He said there is also a similar dossier with Brazil, taking into account that there are many Angolans detained in that country.

The Minister said it is a gesture related to the accomplishment of human rights principles, signed by the Angolan Government on behalf of the state and of the nation.

AU /AFRICA :

Tunisie : arrestation de l'assassin présumé de Chokri Belaïd

le 25.02.2013/LeParisien.fr

Un homme soupçonné d'avoir tué l'opposant Chokri Belaïd et son complice présumé ont été arrêtés lundi en Tunisie, selon des sources policières. Les suspects de ce crime qui a plongé le pays dans une profonde crise politique appartiendraient selon elles à la mouvance salafiste.

Le tueur présumé, un artisan de 31 ans spécialisé dans les meubles en aluminium, a été arrêté à Carthage, dans la banlieue de Tunis, selon deux sources policières. Le deuxième homme est soupçonné d'être le motard qui a permis la fuite du tireur le matin du 6 février après que Chokri Belaïd, opposant virulent aux islamistes d'Ennahda au pouvoir, a été abattu à bout portant en bas de son domicile à Tunis. Les deux suspects appartiendraient à la mouvance radicale salafiste et leur arrestation a été facilitée par le témoignage d'une femme qui a été placée sous protection policière.

Le suspect aurait avoué son implication

L'un de ces sources a précisé que le tueur était actif dans la Ligue de protection de la révolution (LPR), une milice brutale pro-islamiste, du Kram, une banlieue populaire de Tunis voisine de Carthage. Plusieurs médias tunisiens ont aussi indiqué que deux militants salafistes présumés avaient été arrêtés pour le meurtre de l'opposant, citant aussi des sources sous couvert de l'anonymat. Selon la radio Mosaïque FM, le tueur «a déjà avoué son implication dans le meurtre de Chokri Belaïd et a confié qu'il a exécuté une fatwa qui appelait au meurtre» de cet opposant qui dirigeait un petit parti appartenant à une alliance de plusieurs mouvements de gauche et nationalistes, le Front populaire.

Le parti au pouvoir Ennahda montré du doigt

La LPR a été accusée à de nombreuses reprises par l'opposition d'orchestrer des attaques contre des opposants ou des associations pour les intimider. Ses militants sont ainsi soupçonnés du lynchage à mort d'un représentant d'un parti d'opposition à Tatoutine (sud) à l'automne 2012 ainsi que de l'attaque qui a visé le siège du syndicat UGTT en décembre. Une association de défense des minorités en Tunisie, notamment homosexuelle, a aussi directement mis en cause la LPR du Kram pour le saccage de ses bureaux.

La mouvance salafiste jihadiste est pour sa part accusée de nombre de coups d'éclats, certains sanglants, en particulier de l'attaque en septembre de l'ambassade des Etats-Unis, qui avait fait quatre morts parmi les assaillants.

Ennahda, le parti au pouvoir s'est vu reprocher de faire preuve de laxisme voire de complaisance à l'égard des tenants de cette doctrine sunnite rigoriste. La famille du défunt a d'ailleurs accusé à plusieurs reprises Ennahda d'être responsable du meurtre de l'opposant, ce que le mouvement dément.

Une crise politique depuis l'assassinat

La mort de Chokri Belaïd a plongé la Tunisie dans une crise politique sans précédent depuis la révolution de 2011, précipitant la démission du Premier ministre Hamadi Jebali. L'ex-Premier ministre Hamadi Jebali, un islamiste modéré au sein d'Ennahda, avait annoncé le jour de l'assassinat vouloir former un cabinet de technocrates pour stabiliser le pays, où les violences politiques se multiplient, et le conduire vers de nouvelles élections. Désavoué par son parti, il a démissionné au début de la semaine dernière et son ministre de l'Intérieur, Ali Larayedh, a été chargé vendredi de former un nouveau gouvernement d'ici au 8 mars. Ce dernier avait annoncé jeudi l'arrestation de suspects dans le cadre de l'enquête sur l'assassinat, tout en précisant alors que les investigations n'avaient pas permis l'identification du tueur, des commanditaires et des mobiles.

La Tunisie est en outre paralysée par l'incapacité de l'Assemblée nationale constituante (ANC) d'aboutir, après 16 mois de travaux, à un consensus sur la future Constitution qui ouvrirait la voie à de nouvelles élections.

LeParisien.fr

Plusieurs morts dans un accident de montgolfière en Egypte

Le Monde.fr avec AFP, AP et Reuters / 26.02.2013

Dix-neuf personnes, dont des touristes français, britanniques et japonais, ont été tuées, mardi 26 février, dans l'explosion d'une montgolfière à Louxor, 500 kilomètres environ au sud du Caire, indiquent un responsable de la sécurité égyptienne et la chaîne Nile TV.

Vingt et une personnes étaient à bord de la montgolfière, qui volait à une altitude de 300 mètres au-dessus de Qourna, quand un incendie a pris dans le ballon, provoquant son explosion et sa chute dans un champ de canne à sucre, selon cette source. Les deux survivants ont été transférés dans un hôpital de la région, indique la même source sécuritaire.

Hot air balloon crash in Egypt kills 19 foreigners

Associated Press/February 26, 2013

Luxor, Egypt: A hot air balloon flying over Egypt's ancient city of Luxor caught fire and crashed into a sugar cane field on Tuesday, killing at least 19 foreign tourists, a security official said.

It was one of the worst crashes involving tourists in the country already struggling with a decimated tourism industry, two years after the 2011 uprising that ousted former leader Hosni Mubarak.

According to an Egyptian security official, the balloon carrying 21 tourists caught fire, which triggered an explosion in its gas canister, then plunged at least 300 meters (1,000 feet) from the sky. It crashed into a sugar cane field outside al-Dhabaa village just west of the city of Luxor, 510 kilometers (320 miles) south of Cairo, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to talk to the media.

The casualties included French, British, Chinese and Japanese nationals, the official said. Two survivors of the crash were taken to a local hospital with critical injuries.

Bodies of the slain tourists were scattered across the field around the remnants of the balloon. An Associated Press reporter at the crash site counted eight bodies as they were put into body bags and taken away.

Hot air ballooning, usually at sunrise over the Karnak and Luxor temples as well as the Valley of the Kings, is a popular pastime for tourists visiting Luxor.

Tourism is one of Egypt's economic pillars and main revenue of foreign currency.

The site of the accident has seen accidents in the past. In 2009, 16 tourists were injured when their balloon stuck a cellphone transmission. A year earlier, seven tourists were injured in a similar crash.

Gaza Rocket Hits Israel for First Time Since November Operation

By Calev Ben-David/bloomberg.com/Feb 26, 2013

A rocket fired from the Gaza Strip struck southern Israel today for the first time since Israel concluded a military operation in November against militants in the Palestinian enclave in order to stop such attacks.

There were no injuries reported, an army spokeswoman said, speaking anonymously in accordance with military regulations.

The rocket strike comes after a week of protests in the West Bank over the treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

Israel's November operation in Gaza concluded with an Egyptian-mediated agreement with Hamas

and other Palestinian militant groups to halt rocket attacks.

Clashes leave hundreds dead in Darfur

February 26 2013/Reuters

Khartoum - Fighting over control of a gold mine in Sudan's Darfur region has killed more than 500 people and destroyed 68 villages since January, a Sudanese lawmaker said on Monday, sharply increasing estimates of the casualties from the violence.

Law and order has collapsed across the arid western region since mainly non-Arab rebels took up arms against the Arab-led government in Khartoum in 2003, accusing it of neglecting Darfur.

Arab tribes in the region, many of whom were armed by the government to quell the Darfur insurgency, turned their guns on each other in January in battles for control of a gold mine and other resources.

The United Nations earlier said the clashes between the Bani Hussein and Rizeigat tribes in Jebel Amer in North Darfur had killed more than 100.

On Monday, Adam Sheikha, a lawmaker for the El Sireaf area that includes the mine, told reporters 510 people had been killed and 865 wounded since the outbreak of violence - the first estimates covering the whole of the recent fighting to come from a member of Sudan's ruling National Congress Party.

"Fifteen women were raped, 68 villages were completely and 120 others partially burned down" and around 20 000 displaced families urgently needed food, added Sheikha.

He said an attack on El Sireaf town had used government-issued weapons and some of them had been on government salaries.

The town is currently crowded with around 60 000 people who fled their homes when fighting broke out in January, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Co-ordinator in Sudan, Ali al-Zaatari, said in a statement.

More could flee unless "the fighting is brought to a complete halt and a lasting solution to the conflict is found", Zaatari added.

The joint UN-African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur, UNAMID, said it had airlifted 37 wounded civilians from El Sireaf on Sunday.

Human rights groups and the United Nations estimate hundreds of thousands of people have died in the Darfur conflict. The government says around 10 000 people were killed.

Violence ebbed from the peak of the revolt in 2004 but has picked up again in recent months.

The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir and some aides to face charges of masterminding war crimes in Darfur. They deny the charges and refuse to recognise the court.

Events in Darfur are hard to verify as Sudan restricts travel by journalists, aid workers and diplomats. In January, authorities denied Reuters a travel permit to attend a government-sponsored

disarmament conference in West Darfur. - Reuters

UN/AFRICA :

US/AFRICA :

US troops to Niger: A new stage in the scramble for Africa

26 February 2013/wsws.org

President Barack Obama's terse notification to Congress last week that American troops are being deployed to the northwest African nation of Niger confirms that a whole new stage in the imperialist recolonization of Africa is now in progress.

The dispatch of the first 100 troops—with hundreds more reportedly to follow—is bound up with a deal signed last month between Washington and the Niger government allowing the US military to set up a drone base on the country's territory, creating the conditions for spreading the Obama administration's remote-control killing spree throughout the region.

The buildup of US forces in Niger comes in the immediate wake of last month's French intervention in neighboring Mali, carried out with critical US logistical and intelligence support, and aimed, in the words of French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, at the "total reconquest" of the former colony.

Both Paris and Washington have justified their military incursions into the African continent in the name of defeating Al Qaeda and associated organizations in Africa. British Prime Minister David Cameron chimed in last month, warning that the prosecution of this war in Africa could span "decades."

The glaring contradiction between this pretext for war in Africa's Sahel region and the line-up of these imperialist powers behind Al Qaeda-linked militias in the sectarian-based war to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria is passed over in silence by the media and the political establishments in all three countries.

No one in the US press, for example, bothered noting that Obama's announcement of the deployment of US troops in a supposed war against Al Qaeda in Africa came on the same day that Washington blocked a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning an Al Qaeda terror bombing that massacred scores of civilians in Damascus.

Behind the incoherence of the pretexts for imperialist intervention, the real forces driving it are clear. Washington finds itself being economically eclipsed in Africa by China, which has emerged as the continent's leading trade partner. Increasingly in competition over strategic resources—West Africa is soon expected to account for 25 percent of US petroleum imports—US imperialism is relying on its residual military superiority to combat this economic challenge.

In the prosecution of this predatory strategy, Al Qaeda serves a dual purpose—providing shock troops for the toppling of regimes seen as obstacles to US hegemony, and serving as a pretext for

other interventions carried out in the name of combating “terrorism” and “extremism.”

Setting up the new base in Niger places US drones just across the border from Nigeria, which until recently has supplied 10 percent of US foreign oil imports and where the Pentagon has grown increasingly involved in an internal conflict involving Boko Haram, an indigenous Islamic sect that appears to have no ties to Al Qaeda nor any ambitions outside of Nigeria.

In light of these developments, the significance of the US-NATO intervention to bring down the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in Libya in 2011 emerges with ever greater clarity. Claiming the lives of some 80,000 Libyans and leaving an entire society in rubble, this was the first war to be commanded by AFRICOM, the regional command set up under the Bush administration in 2007. It was waged to pave the way for new and more far-reaching military interventions.

The Gaddafi regime served as the linchpin of security and economic relations that maintained a semblance of stability in the Sahel region, providing economic aid, for example, that served to cushion the longstanding conflicts between the Tuareg people and the regimes in Mali and Niger.

The toppling and murder of Gaddafi had the altogether foreseeable consequence of destabilizing the region, sending Tuaregs fleeing Libya into Mali, followed by the very Islamist elements that Washington had backed in the war for regime-change in Libya, and thus providing the pretext for both US and French imperialism to intervene again, putting troops on the ground in the region.

Plans for these interventions were well advanced before the first bomb was dropped on Tripoli. The region has been a focus of US strategic calculations for the past decade, beginning with Washington’s Pan Sahel Initiative in 2003, followed by its Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership in 2005.

In this context, the role played by a whole layer of pseudo-lefts internationally in justifying and promoting the war against Libya, touting it as a humanitarian intervention, a crusade for democracy, and even a “revolution,” also becomes clearer than ever.

The academic scoundrel Juan Cole of the University of Michigan used his inflated reputation as a critic of the Iraq war to sell the war in Libya. Gilbert Achcar, a member of the international Pabloite United Secretariat and a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, condemned NATO for not dropping more bombs on the country. And organizations ranging from the Left Party in Germany, to the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and the International Socialist Organization in the US all engaged in the dirty work of politically legitimizing a predatory imperialist war.

The pro-war positions taken by these individuals and groups—in both Libya and Syria—reflect the evolution of a whole socio-political layer rooted in affluent sections of the middle class, which, with varying combinations of political calculation and ignorance, have come to identify their material interests with those of their “own” imperialist powers.

In the context of the escalating imperialist drive to redraw the map of Africa, these elements stand completely exposed as intellectual and political “assets” of the CIA and the Pentagon.

As these layers have moved ever further to the right, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) alone has defended and developed a Marxist perspective on war. For over two decades, from the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, it has analyzed the explosive eruption of American militarism as a reflection of the crisis of US imperialism and its attempt to offset its historic decline by exploiting its continuing military superiority. The ICFI has further explained that

the escalating imperialist violence abroad is inseparably bound up with the ever-widening social chasm separating the ruling financial oligarchy from the mass of working people at home.

It follows that a genuine movement against war and colonialism can be developed only through the independent political mobilization and international unification of the working class in struggle against the root cause of war, the capitalist system. With the events unfolding in Africa, this perspective has been thoroughly vindicated.

Bill Van Auken

Central Africa: U.S. State Dept. On Peace Agreement for DRC and Region

25 February 2013/United States Department of State (Washington, DC)

document

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

STATEMENT BY PATRICK VENTRELL, ACTING DEPUTY SPOKESPERSON

Signature of Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region

The United States strongly supports the initiative of the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and ten other African heads of state in signing the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the Region, witnessed by three African regional bodies and the United Nations.

The continuing security and humanitarian crisis in eastern DRC highlights the urgent need for accelerated reforms within the DRC and increased cooperation among key countries in the Great Lakes region, particularly the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda. We commend all the signatories for acknowledging their essential responsibilities in promoting regional peace and security. We urge the DRC to seize the opportunity to uphold its commitments to an extension of state authority in the east, to security sector reform, and to improved governance. It is equally imperative that the DRC's neighbors respect its sovereignty and territorial integrity by preventing external support to armed groups. We encourage all parties to live up to the spirit and letter of their joint framework agreement.

The framework needs to be a foundation, both within the DRC and in the region, for a sustained and serious dialogue to ensure that the signatories hold each other accountable for their commitments. The United States urges the signatories to quickly establish concrete follow-up mechanisms for implementing the framework at the national and regional level, and with the participation of key stakeholders, including the international community, local communities, and civil society. We are prepared to support this process. In this regard, we look forward to the appointment of a high-level UN envoy to lead international support for the framework's implementation. We also support a close and comprehensive review by the Security Council of the UN peacekeeping operation in the DRC, which will also have a critical role in supporting dialogue and security.

Both the region and the international community must support the Congolese people and the region in breaking the long cycle of conflict and violence. We urge all parties to take advantage of this opportunity to ensure that the future of the DRC and the region is more peaceful and prosperous than the past.

CANADA/AFRICA :

AUSTRALIA/AFRICA :

EU/AFRICA :

RDC : Paris salue la signature d'un accord-cadre pour la paix dans la région des Grands Lacs
(Xinhua)/26.02.2013

Le ministère français des Affaires étrangères a salué lundi la signature d'un accord-cadre pour la paix dans la région des Grands Lacs, visant à pacifier l'est de la République démocratique du Congo (RDC), qui fait face depuis plusieurs années à la présence de groupes rebelles armés dans cette partie du pays.

"La France salue la signature, le 24 février à Addis-Abeba (en Ethiopie), de l'accord-cadre de paix, de sécurité et de coopération pour la RDC et la région", a déclaré le porte-parole du quai d'Orsay, Philippe Lalliot.

"Cet accord a été conclu sous les auspices des Nations unies, de l'Union africaine, de la Conférence internationale sur la région des Grands Lacs et de la Communauté de développement d'Afrique australe, qui seront garants de son application", a-t-il ajouté.

"Il engage notamment les autorités de la RDC à réformer leurs forces de sécurité afin de réaffirmer l'autorité de l'État à l'Est du pays, ainsi qu'à mener des réformes institutionnelles de fond", a souligné le haut diplomate français, tout en indiquant que les pays de la région se sont engagés, pour leur part, "à respecter la souveraineté et l'intégrité territoriale de leurs voisins".

Onze pays africains ont, en effet, signé cet accord-cadre, qui vise à mettre un terme à deux décennies de conflit dans cette partie de l'Afrique des Grands Lacs, source de fortes convoitises en raison de ses richesses minières.

Les Etats africains signataires sont la RDC, bien sûr, mais aussi l'Afrique du Sud, le Mozambique, le Rwanda, le Congo, la Tanzanie, l'Ouganda, l'Angola, le Burundi, la République centrafricaine et la Zambie.

"Nous appelons l'ensemble des États signataires à mettre en oeuvre de bonne foi les engagements qu'ils ont pris et à poursuivre leur dialogue pour parvenir à une issue politique à la crise", a affirmé M. Lalliot.

Le porte-parole a également fait part du souhait de la France de voir désigner rapidement un envoyé spécial des Nations unies chargé de faciliter la mise en oeuvre de cet accord-cadre sur la région des Grands Lacs, tout en appelant à la mise en place d'une brigade d'intervention dans le cadre d'un renforcement de la MONUSCO (Mission de l'Organisation des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en RD Congo).

Famille française prise en otage : «On ne négocie pas», avertit Le Drian
Sébastien Lernoùd/Le Parisien/le 26.02.2013

Pas question pour la France d'accepter la libération d'islamistes emprisonnés au Cameroun et au Nigeria, comme le réclament les membres du groupe terroriste Boko Haram, ravisseurs de la famille française au Cameroun. « On ne négocie pas sur ces bases-là avec ces groupes-là. On ne joue pas à ce jeu de surenchère, a indiqué mardi matin Jean-Yves Le Drian. Nous utiliserons tous les moyens possibles pour assurer la libération des otages que ce soient ceux-là et ou les autres.» Lundi, déjà, Laurent Fabius, ministre des Affaires étrangères, avait indiqué que ces revendications étaient «hors de portée» de la France.

Sur RTL, au lendemain de la diffusion sur Internet d'une vidéo montrant les sept membres de la famille Moulin-Fournier dont quatre enfants, le ministre de la Défense a estimé que «l'horreur s'ajoute à l'effroyable, c'est la première fois qu'il y a des enfants. C'est une situation inacceptable.» Où, quand, comment cette vidéo a-t-elle été réalisée ? Les services français mènent «les analyses pour savoir dans quelles conditions» elle a été «tournée», a simplement répondu le ministre. Les membres de la famille ont-ils été séparés, comme l'a laissé entendre François Hollande la semaine dernière ? Ont-ils été localisés ? Sécurité oblige, le ministre de la Défense botte en touche. «On est dans l'incertitude. Je ne souhaite pas répondre», a-t-il indiqué.

Les otages emmenés au Mali? «Une hypothèse de travail»

La vidéo, qui dure plus de trois minutes, montre la famille gardée dans un lieu clos, entourée d'au moins trois de ses ravisseurs dont les visages sont cachés. Vraisemblablement sous la contrainte, Tanguy Moulin-Fournier, le père de famille, lit en français les revendications des ravisseurs. «Nous avons été arrêtés par Ahlis Sunnah Ladda'awatih wal-Jihad. Ils veulent la libération des frères de Ahlis Sunnah Ladda'awatih wal-Jihad emprisonnés au Cameroun. Ils veulent la libération des femmes de Ahlis Sunnah Ladda'awatih wal-Jihad emprisonnées au Nigeria».

Alors que dans la vidéo, les terroristes condamnent le combat de la France contre les islamistes, Jean-Yves Le Drian estime que l'enlèvement n'a pas de lien direct avec l'intervention au Mali. «Une semaine avant qu'ils aient ravi la familles françaises, ils ont pris d'autres otages, Grecs, Libanais.» Néanmoins, les autorités n'excluent pas que les Moulin-Fournier se trouvent au Mali : «C'est une hypothèse de travail.»

«Beaucoup de morts de djihadistes» au Mali

Interrogé sur les combats dans ce pays qui durent depuis 45 jours, le ministre de la Défense a expliqué que l'armée française, désormais, «touche au dur. Dans l' Adrar des Ifoghas, des montagnes similaires au Massif Central, les combats sont violents et se poursuivent au moment où nous parlons. Nous sommes chez eux. Cela nécessite de notre part une action méticuleuse. Il faut passer au sol, au peigne fin, quasiment mètre après mètre.»

Jean-Yves Le Drian l'assure : «On ira jusqu'au bout.» Il a confié que l'armée française faisait «très peu de prisonniers» et qu'il y avait «beaucoup de morts de djihadistes», «tous les jours.»

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