



(La justice sénégalaise a condamné lundi Karim Wade, fils de l'ex-président Abdoulaye Wade, à six ans de prison et une amende de 138 milliards de francs CFA (220 millions de francs). Mais il garde ses droits civiques et pourra être candidat à la présidentielle de 2017.)

BURUNDI :

Burundi: le président Nkurunziza contesté au sein même de son parti

Par RFI /24-03-2015

Au Burundi, le président Pierre Nkurunziza n'a jamais caché son intention de briguer un troisième mandat lors de la présidentielle prévue cette année, mais les obstacles semblent s'amonceler sur sa route. Cette fois, il doit faire face à une fronde issue de son camp et qui est conduite par des proches, notamment son porte-parole ou celui du parti. Cette opposition interne n'est pas à la prendre à la légère.

Jusqu'ici, Pierre Nkurunziza devait faire face à une société civile très active et à une opposition politique déterminée à lui barrer la route d'un troisième mandat. Mais leurs menaces d'appeler la population burundaise à descendre dans la rue dès qu'il annoncera sa décision, les réticences de la communauté internationale, ne l'ont pas dissuadé de renoncer à son projet.

Fort du soutien des hauts gradés de l'armée et de la police, issus de l'ex-rébellion aujourd'hui au pouvoir, Pierre Nkurunziza, qui est aussi le président du Conseil des sages, l'organe de décision de ce parti, pensait avoir toutes les cartes en main.

Ce n'est pas le cas. La guerre entre les deux camps au sein de son parti a éclaté au grand jour et les frondeurs avancent désormais à visage découvert. Depuis deux jours, leur pétition circulait secrètement à travers tout le Burundi. Elle aurait déjà recueilli entre 100 et 300 signatures de hauts cadres du parti présidentiel burundais, selon les sources.

En tête, Léonidas Hatungimana, le propre porte-parole du président Pierre Nkurunziza, ou encore, Onésime Nduwimana, jusqu'ici porte-parole du parti CNDD-FDD au pouvoir. Sur cette longue liste, on trouve également la présidente de la ligue des femmes de ce parti, des députés, un gouverneur de province et de hauts cadres de plusieurs ministères. Ces personnalités demandent au président Pierre Nkurunziza d'entendre la voix de la majorité des militants de son parti qui lui demandent, à l'instar de la population, de ne pas briguer un troisième mandat en juin.

Les frondeurs pensent aujourd'hui qu'ils ont avec eux la majorité silencieuse du parti au pouvoir. Ils demandent que le congrès du parti, qui doit choisir son candidat à la présidentielle avant fin avril, soit démocratique. Mais leurs voix semblent ne pas avoir été entendues jusqu'ici.

Le porte-parole du parti au pouvoir a déjà payé son audace. Onésime Nduwimana a été démis de ses fonctions ce lundi matin. D'autres frondeurs assurent recevoir des menaces de mort de la part des services secrets burundais. Ni la présidence burundaise, ni le parti n'ont voulu réagir jusqu'ici. Mais un proche du président reconnaît la mort dans l'âme que « l'heure est grave ».

RWANDA :

RDC CONGO :

UGANDA :

SOUTH AFRICA :

[Indian-origin author assaulted in South Africa](#)

PTI /indiatoday.intoday.in/ March 24, 2015

Johannesburg,

An Indian-origin author in South Africa was brutally assaulted and verbally abused after she praised controversial writer Salman Rushdie whose work has angered Muslims around the world.

Zainub Priya Dala was hit in the face with a brick last week after she praised Rushdie's writing at a school in Durban, a city on the country's east coast.

Dala had been due to launch her novel 'What About Meera' in the city on Saturday, which was ironically Human Rights Day in South Africa, but had to postpone it after being injured.

She was reportedly followed from the hotel where the festival was taking place by three men in a vehicle who forced her car off the road.

When she stopped her vehicle, two of the men came to the car, one allegedly putting a knife to her throat while the other struck her in the face with a brick as he verbally abused her.

Dala said she believed the attack occurred as a result of a comment she made during a writing forum for schools earlier in the week, when she and two other authors were asked to comment on their favourite authors.

She replied that she liked the styles of Rushdie and Indian author Arundhati Roy, which led to a number of teachers and students attending the workshop walking out in protest.

Reacting to the attack, Rushdie said the attack on Dala was "appalling and disgraceful".

"I'm so sorry to hear this. I hope you're recovering well. All good wishes," Rushdie said in a tweet.

In her reply, Dala said: "Thank you. I have my family and children around me and am recovering."

Dala has filed an assault case with the police but there have been no arrests yet amid an appeal for any witnesses to come forward.

Steve Connolly, managing director of Random House and her publisher, said: "We condemn completely the brutish attack on author ZP Dala."

"Have we reached such a state of intolerance that we cannot listen to one writer profess admiration for another without wanting to attack her with a brick and a knife? "It is ironic that at a time when the communities of Durban are welcoming writers, some elements are attacking those writers who hold different views. We must not let this shameful and violent bigotry prevail," Connolly said.

Rushdie spent a decade in hiding following a fatwa by Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, calling for his death because of controversial views in 'The Satanic Verses.'

Muslim outcry led to withdrawal of an invitation to Rushdie to a South African literary festival in 1988. A similar situation prevailed in India in 2012, when Rushdie withdrew because of death threats he had received.

TANZANIA :

KENYA :

Kenyan MP in sex saga grilled amid calls for action

Kenya: Outraged Kenyans want action taken against two MPs implicated in sexual harassment allegations that have further dented the integrity of the National Assembly, which was already reeling from bribery and extortionist claims. Yesterday, Imenti Central MP Gideon Mwiti was grilled for six hours over claims he assaulted and raped a woman in his private office in Westlands, Nairobi on Saturday night. Mwiti was questioned by detectives at Gigiri Police Station from 11am to 5pm, after which he left in a police car. Officials said they were headed to a doctor to pick samples from him for tests. The MP was summoned by the police following allegations by a former journalist running a PR firm that he assaulted and raped her in his private office in Westlands. Another MP is also caught up in claims that he harassed a female colleague during a recent tour of Japan. Yesterday, female university leaders and the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) demanded that action be taken in the two cases.

The NGEC asked Inspector General of Police Joseph Boinett to start investigations on the rape allegations against Mwiti. The commission's chairperson Winfred Lichuma said the allegations were disturbing and unfortunate. "We condemn the heinous act in the strongest terms possible. Sexual gender-based violence is on the increase by review of media reports and no excuses are acceptable. It is further disturbing that a lawmaker would be the suspect," Lichuma added. Kenya University Female Student Leaders Association (KUFSLA) gave the Director of Public Prosecutions Keriako Tobiko a 72-hour ultimatum to act on the complaints, failure to which they would organise national protests. TESTING SAMPLES KUFSLA Chairlady Irene Kendi said: "If nothing is done within the set deadline, we are going to organise a nationwide mass action and march to all the offices dealing with crime in this country, including State House."

Kendi said the other MP accused of harassing a colleague during a recent tour of Japan should also face the same fate for disrespecting and insulting a female leader. "We elected these leaders to protect the rights of women but not to molest, attack and sexually violate them. It is the high time men stop intimidating women sexually and start protecting them as sisters, wives and daughters," she said. Yesterday, Mwiti emerged from the interview room at about 5pm saying he would cooperate with the police in the investigations. He insisted he neither assaulted nor raped the woman. Initially, Mwiti had claimed they were with the woman at Njuguna's Restaurant along Waiyaki Way with some of his constituents, but changed tune yesterday and confirmed he met the victim for almost six hours at Pizza Garden and his office. "Yes I was with her from about 5pm to 1am and we left Pizza Garden and ended up in my bar in Krishna building. There were many people there," he claimed.

"When I am called to give samples for testing, I will do so. I don't fear because I know the truth," Mwiti said, insisting the onus is on his accuser to prove the allegations and explain the motive of the allegations. Mwiti said he had known the woman for long and they had a business relationship. He claimed after they parted at 1am, he tried to call her to know if she was home but her mobile phone was off. The MP appeared before Gigiri head of CID Daniel Kandie who took over the case from his colleagues at the Parklands Police Station. Mwiti was accompanied by some of his office staff, a personal assistant and two lawyers who left three hours after he began recording his statement. This was after police conducting the grilling refused to allow them into the interview room. A 29-year-old woman has recorded a statement with police, saying Mwiti raped and assaulted her in his office in Westlands on Saturday night. The woman was still at the Nairobi Women's Hospital yesterday. Her husband told The Standard that the MP had on Sunday called him almost five times seeking a meeting to resolve the matter.

The incident happened when his wife met Mwiti in the MP's office to sign a contract for some public relations work she was to do for him. Mwiti refused to comment on allegations that a doctor forcefully took blood samples from the woman before the rape. Police said they would also record statements from the doctor, identified as only Dr Mwangi operating in Ngara. The officers said they were also looking for three men said to have been with Mwiti when the incident happened. "As usual, police will be impartial in ensuring there is justice and truth. We don't take rape allegations

lightly,” said Nairobi police boss Benson Kibue. Last evening, detectives visited the office where the incident happened as part of their investigations. The woman said she was introduced to Mwit by her husband who is a property valuer and who has also recorded a statement with police over the incident. He narrated how he tried to locate his wife after she informed him Mwit was drunk and wanted to rape her in his office.

ANGOLA :

AU/AFRICA :

African elephants could be extinct in wild within decades say experts

Agence France-Presse/Tuesday 24 March 2015

The Africa Elephant Summit being held in Botswana hears of alarming drop in numbers due to poaching

African elephants could be extinct in the wild within a few decades, experts warned at a major conservation summit in Botswana that highlighted an alarming decline in numbers due to poaching for ivory.

The Africa Elephant Summit, held at a tourist resort in Kasane, gathered delegates from about 20 countries across Europe, Africa and Asia, including China – which is accused of fuelling the illegal poaching trade.

“This species could be extinct in our lifetime, within one or two decades, if the current trend continues,” Dune Ives, senior researcher at Vulcan, a philanthropic organisation run by US billionaire Paul Allen, said.

“In five years we may have lost the opportunity to save this magnificent and iconic animal.”

The conference heard latest figures from the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which reported that the African elephant population had dropped from 550,000 in 2006 to 470,000 in 2013.

East Africa has seen the worst decline, from 150,000 to about 100,000.

“The overall objective of this meeting is to secure commitments at the highest political level to effectively protect the elephants and significantly reduce the trends of killings of elephants,” said Elias Magosi, from the Botswanan environment ministry.

“The current killing rate is unsustainable and the population of African elephants is in danger.”

Elephant hunting is often organised by international criminal networks to supply the illegal ivory market, mainly in Asia, with some profits thought to fund regional conflicts and militants.

“These syndicates take advantage of conflicts, social unrest, poor governance,” Magosi said.

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring group, said ivory trading routes demonstrated the flow from Kenya and Tanzania to transit countries including Vietnam and Philippines, before going on final markets in China and Thailand.

There, the ivory is sculpted into jewellery or art pieces that are prized by the wealthy.

“Thailand is still a country of great concern,” Tom Milliken of TRAFFIC said.

“(But) China is the most important country that we are dealing with in the world with respect to illegal ivory trade.”

Tshekedi Khama, Botswanan minister of tourism and wildlife, also railed against China, saying: “Whether we like it or not, the determining fact and the end result is totally in the hands of China.”

Participants told AFP that during a closed discussion at the conference, a Chinese delegate complained that the country was being unfairly targeted and should be considered an ally in fight to save the elephant.

The delegate said China funds anti-poaching efforts in Africa and is strengthening legislation.

The conference follows up a 2013 meeting when 30 countries adopted a set of urgent conservation measures, including a call to unite against poaching and for improved criminal prosecution.

“We need a lot of collaboration,” said Kelly Landen from Elephants Without Borders.

“Elephant are crossing frontiers and moving from safe areas to poaching areas. This need to be addressed. But we are moving in the right way.”

On Wednesday, the Conference on Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) will also meet in Kasane to focus on the trafficking of all threatened species – an illegal trade worth \$19bn a year, according to the International Fund for Animal Welfare.

Ivory is reportedly bought at \$100 per kg (\$45 per pound) from poachers, and sold for \$2,100 in China.

Julian Blanc, an elephant specialist for the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), said the link between poverty in Africa and poaching highlighted one way to tackle the illegal killing of elephants.

“We have monitored a direct correlation between human infant mortality (a measure of poverty) at district level and levels of poaching,” he said.

“In places where there is high level of infant mortality and poverty, we monitored the highest level of elephant poaching... so addressing poverty is a significant component of elephant conservation.”

Tunis : moins d'une semaine après l'attentat, le musée du Bardo rouvre

AFP/ 24 mars 2015

Mercredi dernier, 21 personnes dont 20 touristes avaient trouvé la mort dans un attentat revendiqué par le groupe Etat Islamique.

Le musée du Bardo rouvre ses portes mardi à Tunis, six jours après l'attentat revendiqué par le groupe Etat islamique qui a coûté la vie à 21 personnes, dont 20 touristes, et leur poste à deux chefs de la police, limogés lundi.

Principal musée tunisien, le Bardo rouvrira dans l'après-midi après une cérémonie organisée par le ministère de la Culture. Le conservateur du musée, Moncef Ben Moussa, a parlé d'un acte «symbolique»: «C'est un défi mais aussi un message (...). Nous voulons dire qu'ils (les assaillants) n'ont pas atteint leur objectif». Des internautes ont également lancé un appel à manifester devant le musée à cette occasion, en plein coeur de la capitale. Lundi, deux chefs de la police à Tunis ont été limogés pour des «lacunes» dans la protection du quartier du musée.

Le chef du gouvernement Habib Essid a effectué dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi «une visite et a constaté plusieurs lacunes. Il a décidé de limoger un certain nombre de responsables dont les chefs de la police de Tunis et du Bardo», a indiqué lundi Mofdi Mssedi, le chargé de la communication du Premier ministre. M. Essid a immédiatement nommé leurs successeurs. En outre, le parquet a indiqué qu'un «mandat de dépôt» avait été émis contre un policier «chargé de la sécurité du musée», refusant de dévoiler les raisons de son arrestation.

Ministre de l'Intérieur en 2011 après la révolution, Essid avait déjà admis que l'attaque, qui a coûté le 18 mars la vie à 20 touristes étrangers et un policier tunisien, avait révélé des défaillances sécuritaires graves. «Nous sommes en train d'évaluer la situation et de prendre les mesures nécessaires pour que ce ministère de l'Intérieur fasse son travail», a-t-il déclaré dans un entretien publié lundi par le journal français Le Figaro et la radio RFI.

Les deux tireurs, armés de kalachnikovs, ont attaqué le site qui ne semblait pas bénéficier d'une protection particulière, bien qu'il soit situé dans la même enceinte que le Parlement. Ils ont été tués par les forces de sécurité. Sur l'enquête relative à l'attaque, revendiquée par le groupe jihadiste Etat islamique (EI), les autorités n'ont donné aucune nouvelle indication, au lendemain de l'évocation par le chef de l'Etat, Béji Caïd Essebsi, de la piste d'un troisième suspect. «Problème sérieux»

A l'occasion de l'ouverture du Forum social mondial (FSM), grande messe altermondialiste à laquelle participeront des milliers d'étrangers jusqu'à samedi à Tunis, un défilé est par ailleurs prévu jusqu'au Bardo. Ce forum constituera «une réponse de la société civile. (...) Nous devons inventer un monde nouveau et lutter contre ces monstres», a déclaré lundi Gustavo Massiah, membre fondateur du FSM.

Les autorités ont «pris les mesures nécessaires» pour garantir la sécurité de cette manifestation, a précisé le coordinateur du comité d'organisation, Aberrahmen Hedhili. Dimanche soir, la Tunisie a été une nouvelle fois endeuillée par la mort d'un militaire dans l'explosion d'une mine à la frontière avec l'Algérie, une zone où les forces armées tentent depuis fin 2012 de neutraliser -sans succès pour l'instant- un groupe lié à Al-Qaïda au Maghreb islamique (Aqmi), actif dans les massifs montagneux et forestiers de la région.

L'attaque du Bardo, qui fait planer une menace sur le tourisme, secteur vital de l'économie, est la première à toucher des étrangers en Tunisie depuis l'attentat contre la synagogue de la Ghriba à Djerba en 2002. C'est aussi le premier revendiqué par l'EI, qui sévit dans d'autres pays arabes. Le chef du gouvernement tunisien a reconnu que les autorités avaient «négligé» pendant «un certain temps» la menace que représentent les jeunes partant se former aux armes ou combattre en Syrie et en Irak, mais aussi en Libye voisine, comme les deux assaillants du Bardo. «Ils reviennent aguerris et mieux formés et sont capables d'opérations comme celle (du 18 mars). C'est un problème

sérieux», a-t-il remarqué.

Quelque 3 000 Tunisiens sont partis en Syrie en proie à la guerre civile et en Irak miné par l'instabilité. Des centaines se trouvent en Libye, pays livré aux milices, dans les rangs de groupe jihadistes comme l'EI, selon lui. Environ 500 seraient revenus en Tunisie.

AFP

Au Sénégal, Karim Wade condamné à six ans de prison ferme

ats /romandie.com/ 23.03.2015

La justice sénégalaise a condamné lundi Karim Wade, fils de l'ex-président Abdoulaye Wade, à six ans de prison et une amende de 138 milliards de francs CFA (220 millions de francs). Mais il garde ses droits civiques et pourra être candidat à la présidentielle de 2017.

Ancien ministre et conseiller de son père, Karim Wade était jugé depuis l'été dernier pour "enrichissement illicite et corruption". Il a été reconnu coupable du premier chef d'accusation mais relaxé du second par la Cour de répression de l'enrichissement illicite (CREI), une juridiction spéciale.

Le parquet avait requis contre lui sept ans de prison, plus de 380 millions d'euros (400,4 millions de francs) d'amende, une confiscation de ses biens et une privation des droits civiques.

Mais la Cour spéciale a "écarté l'interdiction de l'exercice des droits civiques, civils et de famille prévus par l'article 34 du Code pénal", a déclaré le ministre de la Justice Sidiki Kaba, réfutant l'existence de tout "projet politique pour couler un adversaire".

Condamnation "politique"

La défense de Karim Wade a annoncé qu'elle allait se pourvoir devant la Cour suprême "pour que le jugement soit cassé et annulé". "La condamnation est politique. Depuis longtemps on veut empêcher un candidat, notre candidat d'être présent à l'élection présidentielle", a déclaré Oumar Sarr, un dirigeant du Parti démocratique sénégalais (PDS), la formation d'Abdoulaye Wade et principal parti de l'opposition.

Karim Wade avait été désigné samedi par le PDS à une majorité écrasante comme candidat à la prochaine élection présidentielle. Alors qu'il s'était présenté comme "prisonnier politique" à l'ouverture du procès le 31 juillet, sa nomination a renforcé son statut.

Le président Macky Sall, qui a succédé à Abdoulaye Wade en 2012, a averti la semaine dernière que son gouvernement ne tolérerait aucune tentative de déstabilisation du pays lorsque l'annonce de la sentence interviendrait.

Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa Top TEF's \$100m Entrepreneurship Programme

thisdaylive.com/24 Mar 2015

Obinna Chima and Solomon Elusoji

The Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF) on Monday announced its first 1,000 African entrepreneurs for the Tony Elumelu Entrepreneurship Programme (TEEP).

The top five countries in terms of the number of winners in the \$100 million entrepreneurship programme were Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Ghana.

The winners, according to the board of the TEF emerged from 52 African countries and territories, as well as a multitude of value adding sectors ranging from agriculture, education, fashion and information and communication technology (ICT)

All the five regions in Africa – North, East, South, Central, and West Africa were represented, as well as all major language blocs – Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone, and Arabic Africa.

Speaking at a media briefing in Lagos, the founder of the TEF, Mr. Tony O. Elumelu, noted that over 20,000 African entrepreneurs from 52 countries applied to the programme, “representing the creativity and potential on display across the continent.”

He also said “the selection of these 1,000 entrepreneurs bring us closer to our ultimate goal – to drive Africa’s economic and social transformation from within and to radically intensify job creation in Africa. Though I have never met or spoken to any of the winners, I am confident that due to the rigorous criteria and selection process, these entrepreneurs are Africa’s hope for the future.

“I will continue to invest my experience, time, influence, and resources to see them succeed. I am embarking on this journey with these entrepreneurs hopeful and inspired.”

The TEEP is a \$100 million initiative to discover and support 10,000 African entrepreneurs over the next 10 years, with a target, according to the TEF, “of creating one million new jobs and \$10 billion in additional revenues in the process.”

On his part, the Director of Entrepreneurship of TEF, Parminder Vir, who was visibly excited about the quantity and quality of the applicants, reiterated the foundation’s commitment to ensuring the growth of budding businesses in the continent.

She said: “The high quantity and quality of applicants we have received is testament to the brilliant ideas and incredible talent that exists in abundance across Africa.

“The Tony Elumelu Entrepreneurship Programme will give structure and support to these African entrepreneurs to develop themselves and to grow their businesses. Through TEEP, the ripple effects of the long-term investments in a new generation of Africapitalists will be felt throughout the continent.”

Meanwhile, Elumelu advised unsuccessful applicants, who were not selected, not to give up on their dreams. He urged them to continue developing themselves, and their business ideas, pointing out that perseverance is one of the key attributes of a successful entrepreneur.

In selecting the final winners, TEF appointed Accenture, a management consulting, technology services, and outsourcing company, as an independent review consultant to thoroughly evaluate each application based on selection criteria approved by the TEEP selection committee. The criteria included: feasibility of the business idea, market opportunity, financial understanding, and scalability, leadership potential and entrepreneurial skills.

UN/AFRICA :

UN-backed report finds high levels of elephant poaching across Africa

India Blooms News Service/ Mar 24

New York, Mar 24 (IBNS): An ongoing decline in overall elephant numbers remains likely as the poaching of African elephants continued to exceed population growth rates throughout 2014, a new United Nations-backed report warned on Monday.

“African elephant populations continue to face an immediate threat to their survival from high-levels of poaching for their ivory, especially in Central and West Africa where the situation appears to have deteriorated,” said John E. Scanlon, Secretary-General of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The latest figures released by CITES’ programme for monitoring the illegal killing of elephants, otherwise known as MIKE, show no increase in the overall poaching trends in 2014 with levels dropping and then levelling off since the peak in 2011.

However, with overall killing rates exceeding natural birth rates, “poaching trends remain far too high and at a level that cannot be sustained,” said a CITES press release.

In its report, CITES identifies 22 countries that are most heavily implicated in the illegal trade in ivory, with areas such as Bangassou, in the Central African Republic; Garamba, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Niassa, in Mozambique; Pendjari, in Benin; and Selous-Mikumi, in Tanzania, remaining of “particular concern.”

“These poaching trends highlight the need to redouble efforts to mitigate the problem by addressing demand for illegal ivory, strengthening management and ensuring sustainable livelihoods for people who live with elephants,” said Julian Blanc, head of the MIKE programme.

Scanlon nonetheless admitted that despite the downbeat assessment, there were also some “encouraging signals” in parts of East Africa, where overall poaching trends appeared to have declined, indicating “what is possible through a sustained and collective effort.”

“The momentum generated over the past few years is translating into deeper and stronger efforts to fight these crimes on the front line, where it is needed most – from the field, to police and customs, to illicit markets,” he continued.

He added, “And this enhanced front line effort gives us confidence that if we persist with, and deepen this collective effort, we will reverse the devastating poaching trends of the past decade.”

UN says Ebola outbreak in West Africa will be over by August

ANI/business-standard.com/March 24, 2015

London

The head of the United Nations Ebola mission has said that the Ebola outbreak in West Africa will be over by August this year.

According to BBC, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed accepted that the UN had made mistakes in its response to the Ebola outbreak and acted "arrogantly".

The Ebola epidemic has killed more than 10,000 people after it was declared a year ago.

The medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres said that the tragic consequences were due to a "global coalition of inaction".

The Charity suggested that their initial calls for help were ignored by local governments and World Health Organization.

Central Africa in urgent need of agricultural assistance: FAO

India Blooms News Service/Mar 24

New York, Mar 24 (IBNS): The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has launched an urgent appeal to help provide farmers in the Central African Republic (CAR) with seeds and tools for the country's upcoming planting season, warning that without additional assistance vulnerable populations risked a further deterioration of their livelihoods.

In a news release issued on Monday, the UN agency reported that some 1.5 million people in CAR remain food insecure amid ongoing hostilities throughout the country and cautioned that the figure was likely to rise should immediate support not be provided.

"The smooth implementation of the agriculture campaign activities is key to contribute to the decrease of political tensions, of which the main cause is extreme poverty," said FAO's Representative in CAR, Jean-Alexandre Scaglia.

He added, "Agriculture remains the most important source of income for the majority of the population in the country."

More than two years of civil war and sectarian violence have displaced thousands of people in CAR. According to UN estimates, nearly 440,000 people remain displaced inside the country while some 190,000 have sought refuge across the borders.

In December, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous warned of a potentially explosive situation in CAR amid continuing violent clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka alliance and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian.

Scaglia noted that ensuring planting during the upcoming season, along with longer-term resilience activities, provided an opportunity to contribute to the country's peace efforts and "should not be missed."

Currently, FAO has secured funding to assist 86,400 households but it is appealing for an additional \$6.2 million to support a further 63,600 households for the upcoming main planting seasons starting in April.

As a result of the effort, each family will receive critical agricultural aid such as seeds and farming tools to cover food needs for up to five months, reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance and stabilize their incomes.

The alternative, the agency said, would be a worsening of the country's "significant food shortages" and population movements increasing latent tensions.

US/AFRICA :

CANADA/AFRICA :

AUSTRALIA/AFRICA :

EU/AFRICA :

CHINA/AFRICA :

INDIA/AFRICA :

BRAZIL/AFRICA :

EN BREF, CE 24 Mars 2015... AGNEWS/DAM, NY, 24/03/2015