

Congo wants UN to beef up mandate of the UN peacekeeping force so it can 'neutralize' rebels
By Associated Press
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UNITED NATIONS — Congo said it wants the U.N. peacekeeping force in the African country to “neutralize” a new rebel movement and a force that helped perpetrate Rwanda’s 1994 genocide and protect the tense and porous border with neighboring Rwanda.

Congo’s Foreign Minister Raymond Tshibanda N’tunga Mulongo also called on the Security Council to impose sanctions on those named in a U.N. report in July that accused high-ranking Rwandan officials of helping to create, arm and support the new M23 rebels within Congo — as well as the rebel movement’s leaders.

Mulongo held a news conference after discussions this week with the Security Council and the panel that wrote the July report.

Rwanda’s Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo, who has vehemently denied the accusations, was also at U.N. headquarters this week meeting with the panel and council members to protest the report’s findings.

Congo’s mineral-rich east is facing the worst upsurge in fighting in years, which has forced some 280,000 people from their homes.

The fighting escalated in April when army deserters calling themselves the M23 Movement launched a rebellion to demand better pay, better armaments and amnesty from war crimes.

Rwanda blames Congo for the upsurge in violence, but Mulongo said the evidence in the panel’s report clearly points to Rwanda’s involvement.

The conflict in the east is a spillover from the 1994 genocide. Hundreds who participated in the mass slaughter escaped into Congo and still fight there. The M23 rebels are an incarnation of a group of Congolese Tutsi set up to fight Rwandan Hutu rebels in Congo.

Mulongo said that all of Congo’s borders are quiet except for the border with Rwanda.

Instead of trying to introduce a second foreign force to help bring peace to the volatile east, he said his government wants the Security Council to beef up the mandate of the 22,000-strong U.N. peacekeeping force to address the escalating violence.

“I don’t think it requires a much larger force,” Mulongo said. “For sure, it requires a more robust mandate.”

He said the government envisions a special unit being created within the U.N. force for a limited period of time — six to nine months — to try to get M23 and the FDLR, or Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda led by Hutus who helped perpetrate Rwanda’s 1994 genocide and escaped to Congo, to “simply stop what they’re doing.”

“We think there may not be any need for fighting,” Mulongo said. “When we say that we want the eradication of this movement, let’s say it clearly, as far as we’re concerned that doesn’t mean killing people.”

“We’re asking that they cease to exist as a movement, as an ideology, and we think that can be achieved if there is a resolute force that’s prepared to use force if these people do not stop. But I think with that alternative before them, they will stop,” he said.

If it’s done properly, he predicted that within a year “this matter will be resolved.”

What was the Security Council reaction to the proposal?

Mulongo said he tried to convince the council that neutralizing the rebels and securing the borders is “an essential complement” to what the U.N. peacekeeping force is already doing to protect civilians, and to what is already being done politically and diplomatically with the support of the region.

Initially, he said, council members misunderstood and thought Congo wanted a second military force deployed. But Mulongo said after discussions this week with council members “I can see an evolution in the right direction.”

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