

France working to avert clash in Burundi - cooperation minister

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PARIS, Dec 28 (AFP) - France wants to consolidate democracy in Africa, and is assisting Burundi's restructuring of its police and gendarmerie to help avoid a bloody clash between Tutsis and Hutus, such as occurred in Rwanda, French cooperation minister Bernard Debre said Wednesday.

He told AFP in an interview that "France will do everything possible to help consolidate democracy in Africa, a process that entails reform of the police, the gendarmerie, the justice system and customs agencies".

He added that he was greatly worried by extremists in Burundi, which he visited during a tour of central Africa. Unlike Rwanda, where the majority Hutus were in power at the time of the civil war and constituted the bulk of the government army, a minority, the Tutsis, control Burundi.

Debre also said that it was nec-

essary to resume dialogue with Zaire, "if one is to avoid having the area explode, especially because of the presence of millions of refugees, particularly from Rwanda", in Zaire.

He said he was awaiting "a signal" from Kigali authorities with respect to democratization and guarantees on the refugees' return "to their homes".

He told AFP that "We are not asking them to organize elections immediately, but rather to indicate their desire to arrange them some day" - adding that he welcomed the fact that Kigali had agreed to the dispatch of 300 observers - 50 from the European Union and 250 from the United Nations - to check on repatriation of the refugees.

Debre favors having France send an ambassador to Rwanda, where a French diplomatic presence has been maintained, and he recommends the dispatch of technical advisors to help in the justice system.

He also said France was supplying six million francs (1.1 million dollars) to send some school supplies for a total of a million children in Rwanda and Burundi.

"We also want to put the French Cultural Center in Kigali into operation", he said.

Debre, a medical doctor himself, stressed three priorities for Africa: health, consolidation of democracy, and promoting use of the French language.

On another point, he again ruled out the idea of a new devaluation of the CFA franc. "That's out of the question. There'll not be any second devaluation, because the first one succeeded".

While pointing to the move's success in certain countries (such as Ivory Coast, Mali and Senegal), Debre acknowledged the difficulties ex-

perienced by some central African countries - such as Cameroon, Congo and Chad - that have seen their programs with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suspended.

In referring to possible privatization of the Air Gabon airline, the cooperation minister said "Our partners have to orient themselves toward reforming public structures and toward privatization". And he said "We also have to stimulate investments" by incentive measures (such as CFA borrowings at reduced rates).

He said France had made itself a spokesman for Africans at the IMF and the World Bank, as well as with France's European partners in connection with the Lome negotiations linking the ACP states (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) with the European Union.

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