

UN Security Council considers easing Rwandan arms embargo

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UNITED NATIONS, March 8 (AFP) - Rwanda is seeking to have a UN arms embargo lifted so it can properly equip its security forces, but several UN Security Council members are only willing to meet the request in part, diplomats said.

Rwanda's UN Ambassador Manzi Bakuramutsa met Tuesday with the five permanent Security Council members - Britain, China, France, Russia and United States - and renewed his call for lifting the weapons ban imposed on his country May 17 of last year after the outbreak of a bloody civil war.

The ambassador said his government needed weapons to equip its urban and rural police forces.

According to UN diplomats, Britain, France and Russia balked at the proposal out of concern that lifting the embargo might send the wrong message to hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees and neigh-

boring governments.

The United States suggested a compromise solution which would allow the central African highland nation to import a limited amount of military hardware, the diplomats said.

Under the US proposal, which appeared to garner general approval, either the Security Council or the UN Sanctions Committee would draw up a list of non-lethal, non-offensive weapons that could be imported by Rwanda.

Hundreds of thousands of Rwandans, mainly from the Hutu majority, have been living in exile since fleeing after Hutu president Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in a suspected rocket attack on his plane in April last year.

His death led to three months of ethnic bloodletting, in which between 500,000 and a million people were slaughtered, before the Tutsi-

led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) seized power the following July.

The RPF accuses Hutu former government troops and extremist militia forces of the genocide of Tut-

sis and moderate Hutus. Many Hutus are scared to return home for fear of reprisals over the slaughter.

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