

Kinshasa [UN team sent to investigate alleged massacres has given the new regime two days to allow it to start work]

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KINSHASA, Sept 15 (AFP) - A UN team sent to investigate alleged massacres of Rwandan refugees in the former Zaire has given the new regime two days to allow it to start work after three weeks kicking its heels, the mission said Monday.

The team has told President Laurent Kabila's government in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that UN human rights investigators intend to start their enquiry Wednesday, according to a statement released here.

Togolese lawyer Atsu Koffi Amega, who heads the investigating panel, told journalists that the mission had decided to start work in the Mbandaka region in the northwest DRC, where many refugees were allegedly massacred.

"The mission this Monday asked Congolese Minister of Planning

Etienne-Richard Mbayha and the inter-ministerial liaison committee to authorise it to begin its work on Wednesday," the statement said.

The investigation team arrived in Kinshasa more than three weeks ago, but has been unable to deploy across the DRC in spite of written assurances given to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

"Today we're starting the fourth week of our stay in the DRC, and we are still waiting for authorisation to begin work on the ground. Twice last week we had to call off scheduled missions," the statement added.

The UN team last week had to quash expectations that it would begin work on Saturday, invoking "conditions" still being laid down by the government.

UN officials say they have not yet secured adequate security guarantees

from the DRC government.

Two earlier UN attempts to visit mass grave sites in the DRC were quashed, forcing Annan to put together his own team under a new mandate.

That mandate was to travel anywhere within the former Zaire to investigate alleged massacres dating from 1993 to the present. The UN team said it wanted to probe "particularly where there were large concentrations or movements of refugees."

On Friday however, the government insisted the team could only go the eastern provinces, and should not pursue allegations from after May 17 this year, when Kabila's forces finally seized power.

His Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation (AFDL) is accused of massacring large numbers of Rwandan Hutus who originally fled into Zaire in 1994, following the seizure of power in Rwanda by the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

Hutu extremists among the refugees, already blamed alongside exiled

former Rwandan government troops for the 1994 genocide of between half a million and 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates, fought against Kabila's forces during the seven-month civil war that finally toppled Mobutu Sese Seko's dictatorship in May.

For his part, Kabila last Wednesday accused the investigators of "dragging their feet," insisting : "We are not opposed to the investigation mission, but we deplore their working methods, which don't respect our national sovereignty.

"Instead of going to the east of the country, these people prefer Kinshasa, where they are doing politics. The mission saw all the pro-Mobutu politicians to ask them if the new leadership will bring in democracy," he said.

He said "it was not part of the commission's mandate to do politics."

"They want to distract us with this story of so-called massacres. They want to disgrace the new regime before the international community," he added.

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