

July 07, 2014

Update on the Conflict/Security Situation in the Rwenzori region.

The security situation in the Rwenzori Region is getting tense by the day. This is after a group of ‘**unidentified**’ people armed with pangas and spears descended on to the districts of Kasese, Bundibugyo and Notoroko. The attacks have since resulted into the death of more than 70 people.

A reporter for KRC 102 FM on 5/7/2014 physically counted 42 dead bodies at Kanyamwirima and 9 dead bodies in Bundibugyo town. Among the dead was a police officer at Kicho police station in Bundibugyo and a UPDF soldier in Kasese. Official reports from senior military personnel have ruled out the involvement of ADF and characterized it as a tribal conflict.

The incident happens immediately after a new King for Bamba –Babwisi and Bavanoma was recently enthroned at a ceremony presided over by H.E.President Y.K.Museveni.



UPDF Soldiers and civilians looking at a dead body of one of the attackers near Stanbic Bank in Bundibugyo town. This attacker had fetiches on his leg.

The incident led to an increased presence of military personnel not only in the three districts of Bundibugyo, Ntoroko and Kasese but also Fort-Portal town.

Since 2012, the region has experienced tribal clashes with some deaths reported, but the July 5, 2014 incident registered the highest number of deaths since the Rwenzururu conflict in 1962. This is reason enough to worry and an indication that the situation is going out of hand.

A recent research titled ***Stuck in the Mist*** (<http://www.krcuganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/stuck-in-the-mist.pdf>) by KRC and RFPJ attributed the recent clashes to a historical narrative of 1919/21 and the 1962 walk out from the Tooro Kingdom Rukurato by Bakonzo and Bamba. The Kasuga VI peace dialogue (2012) deeply deliberated on the growing tribal tensions and highlighted the need for immediate dialogue and reconciliation among the conflicting tribes, namely: Basongora/Banyabindi-Bakonzo, and Bamba- Bakonzo.

It has emerged that most of the attackers in the recent incident and the dead are Bankonzo youths. The police and military personnel have arrested 40 attackers and among them is deputy prime minister of Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu, Jeremia Mutoro. Unfortunately this has worsened the existing tensions among the other groups- perceiving Bakonzo as aggressors. This is more so, given that the first attack targeted the palace of Obudingiya Bwa Bwamba.



Jeremia Mutoro, the OBB deputy prime minister among those arrested.

Kabarole Research and Resource Centre

E: krc@iwayafrica.com/T: +256 77 30 55 21/W:www.krcuganda.org

The Unexplained

The attackers targeted military and police facilities. The attackers at Kicho police station killed 2 police officers, Mugume Bataka and Aliga Swaibu. Reports indicated that the attackers were interested in guns and indeed some took off with unidentified number of guns. This was the same for those who attempted to attack the Kanyamwirima army barracks.

There are many questions that don't have answers. **Why now? Are people too angry that violence is the only means of resort?** The spirit of the attackers seemed quite unusual. There have been tribal differences but not the kind of differences that necessitated attacking the police and the military. The motive by the attackers is yet to be explained, although the UPDF Spokespersons at regional and national level have ruled out the hand of ADF. Anybody who wants to attack government forces will no doubt be an enemy of the state, and indeed the response was a bitter response.

The attacks took place simultaneously in different places in all the three districts which explain some kind of a coordinated effort. In Ntoroko district, 3 people were reportedly killed, after attackers attempted to attack a police facility and 6 more in Kasese district. Most of these were surprise attacks.

Spiritual Powers!

The attackers had fetishes on their legs-a kind of belief that they would be protected from the bullets. Learning from the Lakwena and LRA insurgency, we all know that a spiritual war can be hard to contain. Are we bound to see a spiritual war emerge? ADF may not be involved, but could it turn out to be a new rebel group? Unfortunately the information we are getting from security personnel is quite scanty perhaps to avoid scaring the public.

What we know about tribal conflicts in the region.

The issues of land and economics have for some time now and in the past remained unresolved by present and past governments. For instance, the Bamba-Babwisi suddenly realized that "their" land is increasingly being occupied by Bankonzo. We have heard questions such as, who is controlling what? This is by both Bamba and Bakonzo. This is also the case in Kasese for the Basongora and Banyabindi. The recent recognition of Obundigigiya Bwa Bwamba has further catalyzed these concerns now that the Bamba-Babwisi feel that Bundibugyo is theirs. There have been reports of Bamba-Babwisi deliberately grabbing land from Bankonzo, and this could be a source for the kind of tensions we have recently seen in Bundibugyo District.

There is the issue of population growth especially among the Bankonzo. We have talked to some leaders of Bankonzo who argue that, the Bakonzo have been confined to the mountains for a long time and this will continue to impoverish them, and therefore the need for them to move to the lowlands. In other words, any efforts that omission or commission confines them to the mountains will be retrogressive on their part and unacceptable.

The discovery of oil is among the latest factors accelerating excitement among the different tribes in the Rwenzori region. Many of these groups have had high expectations to benefit from royalties from the oil revenue. Indeed, a district and a cultural institution seem to present an opportunity for territorial control, and create a platform to prepare for the demand for royalties.

Kabarole Research and Resource Centre

E: krc@iwayafrica.com/T: +256 77 30 55 21/W: www.krcuganda.org

For those with a strong attachment to the new cultural institutions, to them they present an opportunity to address a long history of economic, social and political grievances.

There have been underlying issues such as who is controlling the resources, and inequalities among the minority groups, namely; Basongora, Banyabindi and Bokonzo in Bundibugyo.

Granting districts/cultural institutions as was recently done in Bundibugyo, only strengthened the resolve for the most dominant tribes to demand for territorial control and eliminating - “those who are not part of us”.

Our efforts!

In the short term KRC intends to engage with local leaders as well as security agencies by way of sharing information generated through one to one discussion, research and the online early warning system to address an eminent conflict problem in the region. Additionally, we shall continue to inform the public through the new KRC media establishment - KRC 102 FM.

In the medium and long term, KRC will continue to build on peace activities such as youth camps, training peace actors in alternative to violence skills and conflict sensitive planning, as well as organize a regional leaders’ retreat to discuss strategies for long term harmonious co-existence among the different tribes.

Kabarole Research and Resource Centre

E: krc@iwayafrica.com/T: +256 77 30 55 21/W: www.krcuganda.org