

UN Security Council Moves to Help African Forces in CAR

From VOA Learning English, welcome to As It Is! I'm Mario Ritter.

Today we hear about a measure of how African countries are being governed. But first, we learn about efforts to increase security in the Central African Republic following last year's rebellion.

France Promises More Active Role

Last week, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution to support an African Union force in the Central African Republic. France proposed the resolution to help African efforts to bring order to the country. Rebels captured Bangui, the capital, in March.

More resolutions are expected. They include a proposal to make the African force into a United Nations peacekeeping mission.

As we hear from Pat Bodnar, France's foreign minister visited Bangui earlier this week. He talked about expanding security operations.

Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said the African force will grow from 2,100 to 3,500 soldiers. He also said France will send additional troops by the end of the year. He says France will take a more active role in security operations in keeping with Security Council decisions.

Mr. Fabius said the African force "must have the capacity to act and France is going to help." France currently has 410 soldiers in the Central African Republic. The foreign minister said those troops are mainly required to protect the airport and guard Bangui. He said, with upcoming U.N. resolutions, "these different forces will be able to intervene more quickly and effectively."

Violence, including widespread stealing, has forced 400,000 civilians to flee their homes this year. Rebel fighters and self-defense militias have been involved in deadly clashes and revenge attacks in the provinces since early September.

Mr. Fabius said a decision in September to end the Seleka rebel coalition should take effect. That means there should not be armed groups around Bangui or in the countryside. He also said elections must take place as planned in early 2015. He said Nicolas Tiangaye and Michel Djotodia will not be candidates. Mr. Tiangaye is currently acting as prime minister. Mr. Djotodia is the Seleka rebel leader who is now interim president of the Central African Republic.

African troops have been in Bangui since the rebellion began in the north of the country last December. The troops have been largely unable to prevent stealing or to protect civilians. French troops have placed their attention on protecting France's interests in its former colony.

Ups and Downs in the African Governance Index

Mo Ibrahim has announced his seventh annual African Governance Index. Mr. Ibrahim is a businessman from Sudan who became a billionaire in telecommunications. This year's ranking looks similar to last year's list. Avi Arditti tells us more about the list.

Once again, Mauritius is again rated as the best governed of the 52 African nations in the survey. Mauritius received the highest score for personal safety, economic opportunity and development.

Eighteen of the 52 nations received their best scores ever in the latest report. It says, for 94 percent of Africans, governance has improved since 2000. That was the year when data started being collected and studied. Mr. Ibrahim says progress is being made slowly. But he also warns of what he says are worrying developments.

The latest report shows a decrease in safety and the rule of law especially in the six lowest ranked countries. The six are Zimbabwe, Chad, the Central African Republic, Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia. The report says the findings signal a shift toward social unrest.

Somalia again scored worst in all four measures of good governance. Two of those measures are safety and rule of law, and participation and human rights. The other two are sustainable economic opportunity and human development.

Also, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation did not award a \$5 million African governance prize to a former head of state this year. The foundation did not give the award last year either. Mr. Ibrahim created the governance award in 2007. It can go to former African leaders who have left office in the last three years. Candidates for the award must have shown exceptional leadership. They must have been democratically elected. And they must have left office voluntarily after serving only a constitutionally limited term.

Past winners include South Africa's Nelson Mandela, Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique, Festus Mogae of Botswana and Pedro Pires of Cape Verde.

Mr. Ibrahim spoke from his London headquarters. He said a new development in international justice could present difficulties in the future.

On Saturday, the chairman of the African Union said that the group would not permit a sitting head of state to be tried by the International Criminal Court. The court wants to try two current African leaders: Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta. Mr. Kenyatta's trial is set to begin next month over charges that he helped to incite ethnic violence after Kenya's disputed 2007 election. Mr. Bashir is accused of crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide in Darfur.

Mr. Ibrahim says he shares some of the criticism of the International Criminal Court, including accusations that it unfairly targets Africa. But, he says the Africa needs a court to try such crimes.

"Africa does not corner the market in atrocities. There are atrocities everywhere. Why the ICC is not showing the same energy in prosecuting atrocities elsewhere other than Africa, that is a valid question. At the same time, we need really to ensure that in Africa there is no impunity."

The African Governance Index does not include Sudan or South Sudan, which gained independence in 2011. The foundation says it does not have enough information on either nation to rank them.

And that's our show for today. Join us tomorrow for another As It Is program from VOA Learning English.