

Tanzania calls for speedy amendment of refugees convention

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TANZANIA has called for speedy amendment of the 1951 International Refugees Convention to reduce the refugee burden to countries that host them instead of those that generate them.

"The way it is now, the convention puts more burden on countries that receive refugees. We think this is not fair and should not continue in that manner," the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, Jakaya Kikwete, stated yesterday.

Tabling his ministry's budget estimates for 2003/ 2004, Kikwete said it was encouraging that Tanzania's call has gained support of the UNHCR and many other countries. He said "all that we need now is increased pace of review as soon as possible".

On the 500,000-plus refugees currently residing in Tanzania, Kikwete appealed to the international community to immediately address the problem of services to them, particularly food supply. He said it was very saddening that at one point the services fell to the level of 65 per cent of the basic needs of the refugees before increasing slightly to 72 percent.

"The international community should understand that the decrease in food allocations and other basic services to refugees is an impetus for refugees to escape from camps and engage in crime," he said.

Most of the refugees currently in the country are from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the minister said stability with the coming into place of a transitional government is resuming.

On the East African Community (EAC), Kikwete said cooperation among member countries has increased tremendously.

He said the salary of members of the East African Legislative Assembly has been raised from 1,000 US dollars per month to 2,000 US dollars each and allowances for East African Court of Justice have been increased to 250 US dollars for the court president, 225 US dollars for the vice president and 200 US dollars for other judges.

He also said Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda have agreed on customs duty and external tariffs. "We agreed that products from Tanzania and Uganda will enter the Kenyan market without paying any tariffs, whereas those from Kenya will be charged tariffs to, protect products and industries in Tanzania and Uganda," he said.

On terrorism, Kikwete expressed Tanzania's distaste over terror alerts from some of terrorism without informing East African countries. "What disappoints us greatly is how the information on possible terrorist attacks are being issued. Even us, allies in anti-terrorism, read about them in the press without any prior notice. It is better for our friends' to understand that their statements affect us greatly on the part of tourism," he said.

Regarding Iraq, Kikwete said it was not right for nations, developed and developing, to ignore the authority of the United Nations. Doing contrary to the UN was dangerous for world peace, he said.

He said Tanzania believed that the UN had a greater role to play in bringing about an interim rule; institutional building and bringing Iraq back to democracy.

The spokesman of the Opposition on the Ministry, Khalifa S. Khalifa (GandoCUF), commended Tanzania's unflinching stand against the Iraq war.

"It is true that terrorism is a world problem, but the biggest problem is how to interpret who is a terrorist and which is a terrorist act," he said.

Khalifa said the actions of the United States and the United Kingdom did not only encourage terrorist actions, but were by them the worst forms of terrorism in the world history.