



We'll shut out Burundi rebels - Mkapu

11 Nov 2005

By Peter Tindwa and Emmanuel Kihale

President Benjamin Mkapu says he will ask the next government to ensure that the defiant Burundian rebel group PALIPEHUTU-FNL does not operate from Tanzania.

He made the remarks when he met with a 28-member United Nations Security Council delegation at State House in Dar es Salaam yesterday.

President Mkapu, who is due to retire next month, told the delegation led by the French Permanent Ambassador to the UN, Jean-Marc de La Sablière, that the group had been reluctant to hold direct negotiations with the Burundian government of President Pierre Nkurunziza.

“I tried hard to convince PALIPEHUTU-FNL leaders to come to the negotiating table with the Burundi government during talks held here at State House last May.

And they promised me that they were ready to join the peace process,” President Mkapu stated.

Ambassador de La Sablière, among other things, wanted to know if President Mkapu still hoped that PALIPEHUTU-FNL was ready to lay down its arms and hold fresh peace talks.

“I deeply regret to say that leaders of PALIPEHUTU-FNL have let me down. What they have been doing is contrary to the good promises they had made to me during our talks of last May,” President Mkapu told the UN delegation.

President Mkapu, however, said he was ready to meet leaders of the armed group. He added that efforts to look for and convince leaders of PALIPEHUTU-FNL should continue with a view to leading them to the negotiation table.

“Efforts must continue to look for and convince Agathon Rwasa’s leadership to join negotiations aimed at realising durable peace in Burundi,” President Mkapu said.

On the possibility of Tanzania changing its policy of offering shelter to hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries in the Great Lakes region, President Mkapu said the country would continue sheltering refugees.

He, however, said that in the absence of possible persecution in their homeland, Tanzania also wanted to see all refugees go back to their countries of origin.

The UN Security Council delegation wanted to know if Tanzania’s refugee policy was about

to change following the restoration of peace and security in troubled countries in the Great Lakes region.

The delegation is also scheduled to visit Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Uganda to assess peace and stability in the Great Lakes region.

Tanzania has over the years sheltered more than 400,000 Burundian and Congolese refugees.

* SOURCE: Guardian