

GABON SEEKS MILITARY COOPERATION WITH UGANDA

By Frederick Kiwanuka

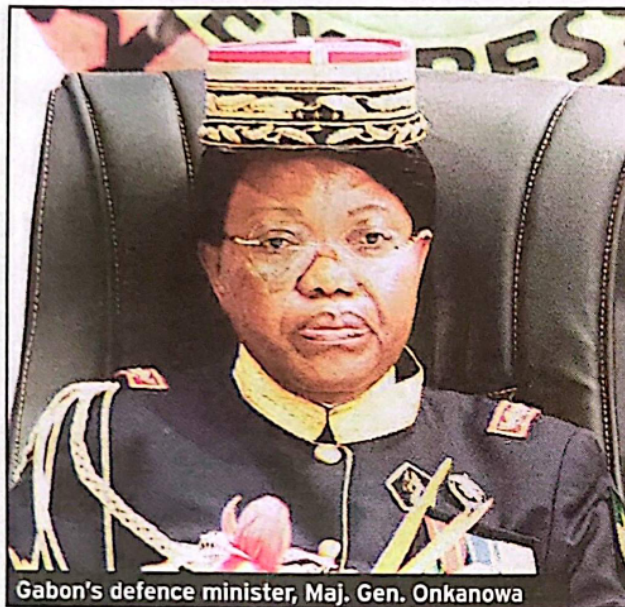
Uganda and Gabon are exploring deeper military co-operation as part of a broader push to strengthen bilateral ties, with the west African nation seeking support to tackle the rising maritime crime on its coastline.

Gabon's defence minister, Maj. Gen. Brigitte Onkanowa, said her country is keen on partnering with Uganda's security forces to address threats in its 800km coastal zone, adding that peace and stability are critical for economic growth.

"We are facing numerous maritime crimes, and this is an area where our two countries can co-operate," Onkanowa said during a visit to Uganda last week.

PROPOSAL WELCOMED

Onkanowa made the remarks while leading an eight-member delegation on a tour of Kapeeka Industrial Park in Nakaseke district, where discussions also extended to economic and industrial collaboration.



Gabon's defence minister, Maj. Gen. Onkanowa

Ugandan officials, led by Gen. Salim Saleh, welcomed the proposal, underscoring the link between security and development. Saleh assured the delegation of Uganda's readiness to deepen co-operation, drawing on its experience in stabilisation efforts and community-based economic programmes.

LESSONS FROM UGANDA

The Gabon delegation's tour of Kapeeka Industrial Park in Nakaseke district highlighted Uganda's growing manufacturing capacity, which Gabon's defence minister, Maj. Gen. Brigitte Onkanowa, said offered lessons for their country's own industrialisation drive.

"What used to be imported from Asia is now being produced here. This is inspiring," she said.



Gen. Saleh, chief co-ordinator of Operation Wealth Creation

The talks on military co-operation come as Gabon seeks to diversify its economy and address a youth unemployment rate estimated at 35%, Onkanowa said.

She said strengthening security, particularly on the maritime routes, would help create a more conducive environment for investment

and trade.

During the visit, Onkanowa also invited Ugandan industrialists to invest in Gabon, citing the country's vast natural resources.

"We want to reduce unemployment through agriculture and industrial development, and we see Uganda as a key partner in this journey," Onkanowa said.

UGANDA'S ECONOMIC MODEL

Gen. Saleh shared insights into Uganda's economic transformation initiatives, particularly Operation Wealth Creation, which he said has helped integrate communities into the money economy.

He said the Government has invested about sh9 trillion in poverty-alleviation programmes over the past 15 years.

Onkanowa also conveyed appreciation for Uganda's support during Gabon's transition to civilian governance. She said the Gabonese leader will attend President Museveni's swearing-in ceremony scheduled for May 12.