

UGANDANS RECRUITED BY S. SUDAN REBELS

BY MARTHA GLORIAS MUSHIME

A group of Ugandans who claim they have been fighting alongside Dr. Riek Machar forces against the South Sudanese government have petitioned President Yoweri Museveni, seeking to return home.

The group, comprising mainly of Ugandans from West Nile, led by a self-styled general, Hajji Arishi Habibu, claim they joined Machar's forces after being witch-hunted by security agencies in Uganda.

Habibu alleged that there were about 5,500 Ugandans fighting alongside Machar and that they were recruited from South Sudan and Ugandan districts of Yumbe, Arua, Moyo, Koboko, Amuru, Gulu and parts of eastern Uganda.

"The group has adopted recruitment tactics, including use of money, persuasion and abductions. They mainly target unemployed youths, army deserters, crime preventers, ex-combatants and disarmed groups," Habibu said in his July 2016 secret letter to the President.

Habibu was demanding to meet the President, saying they wanted him to intervene in a number of issues, including releasing their arrested colleagues and fulfilling the promise of funding them to get out of South Sudan.

He said they had bases in South Sudan at Bentiu, Awili, on the Blue Nile, Rumbek and Wau. According to the letter, the rebel group is getting support in form of ammunition, food and money from Machar's allies, such as Sudan. He named some of his fellow commanders as; Col. Juma Tabu, Maj. Sunday Guma, Cpt. Habibu Drakiri, Musa Onziga, Rasulu Taban and Rasulu Chandiga.

A president's aide, Musa Mbazira, confirmed that they had received the rebels' letter. "But it had mistakes, so, I told them to first correct them. We know their issues. The President has met them three times and we set the date to meet them again on August 5. They should be patient."



The 2013-2014 South Sudan insecurity between government forces and rebels left hundreds of people displaced

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But Daniel Andruha, who delivered the letter on behalf of Habibu, said: "Since December last year, we have

not heard from the President. So we are demanding to know if he is aware of our situation."

In May last year, 22 residents were abducted from Koch sub-county in Yumbe district, which borders South Sudan. Others were shot dead during the scuffle. Although some of the abductees have since escaped, many others are still being held in rebel camps in South Sudan.

Shortly after, government contacted Habibu through the President's military assistant, Brig. M.S Kisame. Kisame reportedly contacted two of Habibu's men (Chandiga and Majid) who persuaded him and he met the President at State House in Entebbe.

According to Habibu, the President ordered security minister Henry

Tumukunde to follow up on their matter, but to date, he (Habibu) has not received any communication from Tumukunde.

Habibu said he joined Uganda National Rescue Front II (UNRF II) rebels in 1995 and trained in South Sudan, before becoming a battalion commander. He remembers commanding battles of Kaya, Makubia, Rojo, Kongbe and Kaji-Keji. Asked why he joined Machar's rebels, Habibu said: "This government could not believe that I had joined them for good and left rebel activities. After being mistreated, thinking that I was still a rebel, even after mobilising for disarmament, I was tortured. So I also had to run to South Sudan for

Abductee says...

One of the former abductees who escaped, Adinani Achena, from Koch village in Yumbe, said: "It was May 16, last year, at around 10:00pm, while we were gathered at Koch sub-county trading centre when one armed man put our village chairman at gun point and led him to us. We were seated where charcoal is sold. They were 10 people who ordered us to give them our phones, remove our shirts and lie down. Most of them were speaking Lugbara, but we knew none of them."

The 44-year-old father of seven said they tied them with ropes around their waists and walked them to Lochombo trading centre in Ramugi sub-county, where they found 13 other residents who had been abducted from other areas. "When one of us tried to escape, they shot him dead, to send a signal to us not to do the same."

my life." Habibu said the President has never fulfilled pledges he made directly to disarmament groups, such as Muyoko, and even agreements signed between former rebels and the Government.

According to Habibu, they planned to overthrow the South Sudanese government (Salva Kiir's regime) before embarking on taking over West Nile as a way of securing their lives.

When contacted, UPDF spokesperson Richard Karemire, dispelled any chance of a rebel group forming in the country or working with South Sudan to recruit Ugandans and cause chaos. "No one can try to cause insecurity in Uganda," he said.