

United Nations Says Over 100,000 Leave Burundi Amid Unrest



United Nations, May 16 (RHC)-- The United Nations says more than 100,000 Burundians have been forced to leave their violence-stricken country, which recently witnessed a coup attempt.

Karin de Gruijl, the senior communications officer with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said that nearly 70,200 Burundians have fled to the eastern African country of Tanzania, 26,300 to neighboring Rwanda and about 10,000 to the Democratic Republic of the Congo since early April. The reported overall figure was more than twice the number provided by the UNHCR last week.

"In particular in Tanzania, numbers have risen very, very sharply over the last few days," the top UN official said. "There are also reports of at least 10,000 people waiting to cross the border into Tanzania," de Gruijl said.

Although the UNHCR had noticed the sharp increase in the number of particularly Tanzania-bound refugees on Wednesday, de Gruijl, the UNHC official, said it was "difficult to say" that the surge was merely linked to the recent attempted coup in Burundi.

The report came on the same day that Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza returned to the presidential palace in the capital, Bujumbura. According to the AP, the presidential motorcade arrived at the palace hours after the leaders of the failed coup conceded defeat. Some were arrested and some were hunted down by loyalist groups.

Meanwhile, hundreds of demonstrators took to the streets of the capital, despite the massive presence of the army. The protesters responded to calls by Burundian civil society groups for renewed street protests against a controversial bid by the president for a third term in office during the June 26 presidential election, which apparently sparked the coup in the first place.

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