

U.N. Offers To Keep Rwandan In Darfur

Commander Is Charged With 1990s War Crimes

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UNITED NATIONS, Oct. 2 -- U.N. Secretary General [Ban Ki-moon](#) has offered to retain a Rwandan general as the global agency's second-highest-ranking commander in Darfur, Sudan, despite allegations that he oversaw troops responsible for war crimes in Rwanda during the 1990s, according to [U.N.](#) officials familiar with the proposal.



U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon, right, meets with Gen. Martin Agwai of Nigeria, head of the joint U.N.-African Union force, in Darfur. The 10,000 strong force includes 3,000 Rwandan troops. (Pool Photo By Zohra Bensemra Via Associated Press)

THIS STORY

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Ban told the Rwandan government last week that Maj. Gen. Emmanuel Karake Karenzi would be granted a six-month contract as the deputy force commander for the [African Union](#)-United Nations Mission in Darfur when his one-year term expires later this month. Ban's offer marked a reversal by the United Nations, which had urged the Rwandan government to replace Karenzi after a Spanish court indicted him and 39 other Rwandan officers on war crimes charges in February.

The United Nations yielded after Rwandan President Paul Kagame threatened to withdraw 3,000 Rwandan peacekeepers from Darfur unless the United Nations renewed Karenzi's contract for one year, a reduction that would have crippled the 10,000-member international force.

But Ban proposed to Kagame in a meeting last week that Karenzi be pushed out within six months, and that Rwanda could then nominate a Rwandan general -- one not on the list of those indicted -- to assume the top command post in Darfur when the current commander completes his term next June. Kagame rejected the terms, but the United Nations is likely to extend Karenzi's contract regardless, the sources said.

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Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#) backed Kagame's bid to secure the post for Karenzi despite the Spanish indictment and a finding by the [State Department's](#) human rights bureau last year of "credible evidence" linking Karenzi to rights abuses. U.S. and U.N. officials say Karenzi has served with distinction in Darfur.

[The Washington Post](#) last month cited internal U.S. documents suggesting that, by supporting Karenzi, the State Department's Africa bureau may have violated a U.S. law, known as the Leahy amendment, requiring that recipients of U.S. financial assistance be vetted. The

United States provides funding for the peacekeeping mission in Darfur. A spokesman for the State Department's Africa bureau denied breaching the Leahy amendment and insisted that Karenzi had been vetted by a variety of U.S. agencies and that there was no conclusive evidence that he had engaged in human rights abuses.

[Sen. Patrick J. Leahy](#) (D-Vt.), the law's author, said in a prepared statement that his staff intends to question State Department officials "to find out how the law was applied in this case so we can prevent it from happening again."

"The fact that the State Department supported General Karenzi's appointment, despite credible evidence linking troops under his command to killings of hundreds of civilians, is very troubling," he said. "Rwanda has been a valued contributor of peacekeepers in Darfur,

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but U.S. law does not permit assistance to human rights violators."

Karenzi was an officer in the ethnic Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front that swept to power in 1994, overthrowing a Hutu-dominated Rwandan government that was responsible for killing more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Africa's bloodiest genocide. Once in power, the Rwandan Defense Forces engaged in a brutal counterinsurgency campaign that left tens of thousands dead, according to human rights advocates.

The Rwandan government has come under increasing scrutiny for its human rights record, particularly in France and Spain, where prosecutors have invoked the right of universal jurisdiction, which allows local courts to prosecute foreign officials for genocide and crimes against humanity. The approach has led to prosecutions of foreign leaders, including now-deceased Chilean military leader [Augusto Pinochet](#), but few convictions.

A French court issued arrest warrants for nine officers close to Kagame in connection with the shooting down of a plane carrying his predecessor, President Juvenal Habyarimana, whose death triggered Rwanda's genocide.

Human rights advocates said Karenzi's permanence in the job sends a terrible message about the U.N. commitment to human rights. "The real blame should be directed at [Paul Kagame](#), who is threatening blackmail against the people of Darfur to prevent any effort to hold a senior Rwandan officer accountable for serious atrocities," said Kenneth Roth, executive director of [Human Rights Watch](#).

Karenzi has repeatedly declined to comment on the allegations, directing calls to the Rwandan military spokesman, Maj. Jill Rutaremara, and other Rwandan officials.

Rutaremara said the allegations are false but declined to address the specific charges. He said in an e-mail that Rwandan "genocide deniers and revisionists" have "hatched" a conspiracy of lies against Karenzi and other Rwandan officers in order to "tarnish the good image of the Government of Rwanda." The Rwandan military, he said, takes "stern action" against soldiers responsible for war crimes or breaches of discipline.

"The same individuals who make these allegations together with their surrogates are guilty of their role in the 1994 Tutsi genocide," he said. "They want to portray the RDF [Rwandan Defense Forces] as genocidaires while knowing very well that the RDF single-handedly defeated the genocidaires and stopped the Tutsi genocide."