

## UGANDA

### External Relations

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President Museveni has been in touch with the Congolese rebel group, the M23, and told them to stop fighting, Defence Minister Crispus Kiyonga has revealed.

Dr Kiyonga told the Sunday Monitor, in an exclusive interview, that secret meetings have been going on between Ugandan authorities and the rebels fighting President Joseph Kabila's government, following a request by the Secretary General of International Conference for Great Lakes Region, Mr Ntumba Luaba. The request came after the M23 rebels threatened to attack Goma town.

“We reached out to them and we have been having quiet contact with them for two reasons. The first reason was to insist that they stop fighting and secondly, to try and understand why they are fighting,” Dr Kiyonga said, “These people are rebels. You need to get their confidence. So, the agreement was that our contact with them should be discreet,” Dr Kiyonga said. “In this case, the quiet contact was appropriate. You can't conduct matters of the rebels in the press. But it was sufficient that all key parties knew what was going on. This was not our initiative, we were contacted and requested to make these contacts discreet.”

The revelation by the minister comes at a time when Uganda is fighting to clear its name with the United Nations, who, in a leaked report, accused Uganda of supporting the rebel group.

In reponse, Uganda has threatened to pull out of the Somalia peacekeeping mission, unless the allegations against it are withdrawn. ICT Minister, also former UN Representative, Ruhakana Rugunda, delivered Uganda's protest letter to the UN last week.

Dr Kiyonga said allegations that Uganda supports the rebels could have been as a result of “misreading” of the meeting between Ugandan authorities and the rebels. “Whatever we get from them, we share with the summit members. I think there are some leakages that these contacts were ongoing and because they are quiet contacts, people say Uganda is now training them politically and giving them political cover,” he said. “That's not our intention. What we are doing is known to the UN and President Kabila's government.”

President Museveni is the chairman of ICGLR and has organised and chaired four heads of state meetings in an effort to bring to an end the fighting in eastern Congo. But the allegations in the leaked UN report that Uganda and Rwanda support M23 rebels threaten to derail these efforts, with questions being raised whether Uganda has the moral authority to continue leading talks between Kinshasa and the rebels.