

UN Accuses Belarus of Breaking Arms Embargo

February 28, 2011



A woman walking past the shell of a burned out public bus torched in street violence in Abidjan on Monday. **Rebecca Blackwell**

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast — Belarus has violated an international arms embargo by sending three attack helicopters to military forces supporting Ivory Coast's longtime ruler who refuses to cede power, the UN chief said, in a dramatic escalation of the nation's political conflict.

Belarus and President Laurent Gbagbo's government denied the UN claim, and UN diplomats said it had not been confirmed.

They said the accusation by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was based on reports he had received from the UN peacekeeping mission in Ivory Coast.

"We're trying to figure out if this allegation is credible," a Security Council diplomat said. "There's a lot of confusion."

Ban's office said the first delivery of helicopters from Belarus reportedly arrived Sunday, and

additional flights were scheduled for Monday.

“This is a serious violation of the embargo against Cote d’Ivoire, which has been in place since 2004,” Ban’s statement said, using the country’s French name. “The violation has been immediately brought to the attention of the Security Council’s committee charged with the responsibility for sanctions.”

Belarussian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Savinykh rejected the accusations Monday, calling them “groundless.”

“Belarus hasn’t supplied any weapons to Ivory Coast in violation of UN sanctions,” Savinykh said, adding that the country has strictly observed all decisions by the UN Security Council and has efficient controls over arms trade.

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko is often called Europe’s last dictator and has led the former Soviet state since 1994. He was declared the winner of an election widely regarded as fraudulent that took place just weeks after the Ivory Coast vote.

Gbagbo’s air force was destroyed by the French military during the country’s earlier civil war, which erupted in 2002. The arrival of the attack helicopters means that the Gbagbo regime now has air power, which could not only endanger civilian areas but also the Golf Hotel where the man considered to be the legitimate president of Ivory Coast is holed up with hundreds of his supporters.

Alassane Ouattara was declared the winner of the Nov. 28 presidential election by the country’s elections commission. Gbagbo refused to accept defeat even though the UN reviewed the results from over 20,000 polling stations before certifying Ouattara’s victory. Ouattara was forced to take refuge inside the hotel, where he is now under 24-hour UN guard.

Several hundred UN peacekeepers are stationed on the grounds, but it is not clear whether the UN is set up to protect the hotel from an air assault.

The UN Refugee Agency said Monday that as many as 30,000 civilians had fled the Abobo neighborhood of Abidjan where the fighting raged over the weekend, leaving several dozen dead.

Belarus has supplied arms to other African countries, including selling 15 Su-25 jets to Sudan since 2008. Unidentified UN Security Council diplomats expressed concern last fall that Sudan might be using the jets for air attacks in Darfur in defiance of a UN arms embargo.

(AP, Reuters)

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/02/28/un-accuses-belarus-of-breaking-arms-embargo-a5283>