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Congo: U.N. Agency Begins Pullout After Expulsions By Govt

KINSHASA, Congo (AP-Dow Jones)--The United Nations refugee agency began pulling its staff out of eastern Congo on Monday, three days after being expelled by the Congolese government.

'We're leaving with all deliberate speed,' Pierce Gerety, regional director of operations for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, said in Nairobi, Kenya.

Gerety said nine staff members had flown out of Goma, a town in eastern Congo, to Kenya on Monday.

Six more staff members - including two from other agencies who are currently working for UNHCR - were expected to leave in the next few days, he said.

On Friday, Congo ordered UNHCR workers out of eastern Congo. Interior Minister Mwenze Kongolo accused the group at a news conference Sunday of getting involved in internal political activities, specifically mentioning its protests over the forced repatriation of Rwandan refugees.

Kongolo said he was awaiting a report from government officials, and several other aid agencies may also be expelled from eastern Congo. Officials in Kinshasa had no word Monday of further expulsions.

Gerety rejected Kongolo's accusations.

'Statements that we have been involved in their political activities are not correct and are surprising,' he said.

Thousands of Rwandans have crossed the border into eastern Congo in recent weeks seeking refuge from an increasingly violent insurgency in their country. The Congolese government has begun sending them back home.

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