VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Jonathan Smith reporting.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Wednesday he holds the military leadership in Myanmar responsible for the current refugee crisis affecting the country's Rohingya Muslim population.

"We really hold the military leadership accountable for what's happening with the Rakhine area. What's most important to us is that the world can't just stand idly by and be witness to the atrocities that are being reported in the area."

Tillerson's comments came after a report was released by the human rights activist group Amnesty International, in which Myanmar security forces are accused of carrying out a systemic purge of the Rohingya people.

Tillerson said "someone is going to be held to account" for the atrocities.

Tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Mogadishu and other major Somali cities on Wednesday, condemning those behind the massive explosion on Saturday that killed nearly 300 people and wounded more than 400 others.

The protest in Mogadishu came in response to a call from the city's mayor for a massive rally to pray for those killed and injured in truck bombing, which the government blames on Islamist groups like al-Shabaab.

Ahead of the rally, young men wearing red headbands forced businesses to shut down.

The demonstrators chanted slogans like "down with the enemy, down with al-Shabaab." They later gathered at the city's soccer stadium, where the president and other leaders joined them.

President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed urged Somalis to take up arms for what he called a tough war with al-Shabaab.

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Chinese President Xi Jinping said his country faces both opportunity and challenge. He spoke at the opening of the ruling Communist Party's twice-a-decade national congress on Wednesday.

He promised that Beijing would allow more market-oriented reforms of its economy. But he said the government would play a bigger role in managing state-owned firms.

North Korea's government has relied for decades on illicit trade to fill its comforts. But a new report notes what appears to be a recent rise in Pyongyang's trafficking of illegal wildlife from African nations.

VOA's Anita Powell reports from Pretoria that the report by the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime warns the trade is putting further pressure on the continent's endangered rhino and elephant populations.

At least 11 African nations have trade links to North Korea, in part, because the nation frequently offers good deals in order to prevent economic isolation.

Researcher Zachary Donnenfeld of the Pretoria-based Institute for Security Studies says many African nations are reluctant to cut those ties.

"If a country like North Korea comes along and offers a relatively good deal on refined petroleum, for instance, which is one of their main exports of Africa, it's understandable that African governments may not ask a lot of questions about where that petroleum comes from in the face of all these massive pressures on service delivery."

Rademeyer says laws exist to stop illegal trade by diplomats but the will is often absent.

"Governments don't want to become involved in diplomatic incidents. Governments with close ties to North Korea don't particularly want to inflame tensions. But the Vienna Convention does allow for cases where there is evidence or there is a compelling case to be made that illegal items are being smuggled to search those bags and take action."

Anita Powell, VOA news, Pretoria.

A member of Kenya's election commission has resigned just a week before the presidential re-vote, increasing the political turmoil in the East African nation.

Roselyn Akombe issued a statement from New York Wednesday saying the planned October 26 re-vote "cannot meet the basic expectations of a credible election." Akombe says the embattled electoral commission is "under siege" from infighting and political intimidation.

Akombe told BBC Radio that she fled Kenya after receiving numerous threats to her safety.

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That's the latest world news from VOA.