

Thousands of Burundian and Rwandan nationals have converged on bus terminals across Kenya, seeking to return home after President William Ruto announced a crackdown on foreign nationals operating hawking and small trading businesses without proper documentation.

The announcement, which takes effect September 7, has triggered scenes of panic in Nairobi and other urban centers, with many East African migrants citing fear of harassment or attacks from Kenyan youth as their primary motivation for leaving, rather than the trade restrictions alone.

The Burundian Embassy in Nairobi has been inundated with citizens seeking travel documentation. In a notice dated September 5, the embassy announced it would issue free Laissez-Passer travel documents to nationals unable to access valid passports.

A spot check by Kenyan Citizen Digital found hundreds of Burundians gathered outside the embassy on Dennis Pritt Road on Monday morning, many carrying identification documents and existing permits.

An embassy official, speaking to Citizen Digital, characterized the documentation drive as part of routine consular operations rather than an emergency response. "It is not because of the current situation. We do this daily; we give travel documents to those who do not have them, or those whose documents have expired. These are standard consular services," the official said.

Beyond the embassy, cyber cafés in the vicinity of Dennis Pritt Road have also reported high volumes of Burundian nationals processing travel paperwork. One individual, speaking on condition of anonymity told Citizen Digital, he had been advised to prepare the necessary documents ahead of a possible return home.

According to reports, approximately 38 Burundian nationals are scheduled for voluntary repatriation, marking the first group to leave the country since the crackdown was announced. An estimated 300,000 Burundian francs is said to have been the cost some migrants originally paid to enter Kenya, an investment now being abandoned as families make plans to leave, with some opting to relocate to Uganda instead of returning to Burundi.

The Burundian government has formally raised concerns over the treatment of its citizens in Kenya, alleging harassment, mistreatment, and instances of forced

removal.

Separately, a video circulating on social media platform X showed several men, identified as having Kenyan wives and children, addressing President Ruto directly, stating that they intended to leave their families behind in Kenya and would not continue providing financial support, calling on the president to assume responsibility for their welfare.

Government Responds to Backlash

The unrest follows Ruto's public warning last week targeting foreign nationals engaged in illegal small-scale trade within Kenya. Following widespread criticism, Foreign Affairs Principal Secretary Korir Sing'oei sought to clarify the government's position on Sunday, stating that the president's remarks had been misinterpreted.

"We assure that small or large traders and employees of all nationalities, with the requisite documentation, work permits and licenses, are legally protected to operate in Kenya," Sing'oei said.

He further stated that Kenya remains open to foreign nationals conducting legitimate business. "Burundian nationals and all East Africans, and Africans for that matter, are free to live in Kenya as long as they conduct their businesses or work according to the requirements of our law," he added.

As of Monday, the situation at Kenyan border crossings and transport hubs remained fluid, with East African governments continuing to monitor developments.