

# Rwandan hospital massacre kills 170, aid agency says

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NAIROBI, April 24 (Reuter) - About 170 patients and staff, helpless in a south Rwanda hospital, were slaughtered on Sunday, the latest massacre in the central African country's civil war, a medical aid agency said.

Doctors with Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) reported the killing from Butare, in southern Rwanda.

"This has been the most vicious single incident in this current wave of violence. It was a direct attack on civilians in what is usually a neutral place," said Anne-Marie Huby, a spokeswoman from the organisation in London.

MSF was pulling its staff out of southern Rwanda, she said, adding that information received from the doctors was sketchy and they were urgently seeking more details.

It was not clear whether the 170 dead were all patients or included the organisation's local staff.

Butare lies some 25 km (15 miles) from the frontier with Burundi and thousands of refugees fleeing Rwanda's civil war have been trapped because of closure of the border.

Earlier on Sunday, journalists in rebel-controlled territory just south of the Rwandan capital, Kigali, where fighting raged for much of the day, came across a pile of 100 rotting corpses in Nyanza. More bodies spilled out of mud huts there.

Near corpses, a six-year-old girl hid under a blanket. She pretended to be dead when rebels approached and collapsed from fear when one picked her up and took her to a bush medical post.

The gaping machete wound in her neck needed first aid. She said later she had seen all her family slaughtered.

A baby boy, only months old and wearing a white sleeping suit, lay dead, spreadeagled on his back with his arms flung out, a few metres (yards) from the fly-covered corpse pile.

Survivors of the massacre said they were among up to 2,000 Tutsi civilians who were stopped on April 17 by government troops as they were trying to reach Amahoro stadium in Kigali. Allied militiamen forced them to climb Nyanza hill.

"My wife had a child on her back and she was cut because she could not walk quickly," a factory worker, wounded in an arm and leg, told Reuters Television

from inside territory controlled by the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF).

“We were beaten. Everyone was trying to hide in the group so they would not be beaten or cut with machetes. When we reached Nyanza they told us to sit and we sat. We were almost more than 2,000.

”We sat there. They (militiamen) said to get the grenades ready. No one was moving. We were surrounded by the militias. And then they threw the grenades...”

Like many of the other massacres in the pitiless war mainly between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi, no absolute figures will ever be known. Aid workers have spoken of wounded crawling away to escape, then dying alone.

But their agencies estimate 100,000 people have been slaughtered since April 6 – more than 5,500 dead every day.

Two million people have been made homeless since that day when the country erupted over the death of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana. He and his Burundian counterpart perished when their plane was hit by a rocket.

In Kigali on Sunday, U.N. troops evacuated 300 people from the Meridien Hotel and took them to the King Faisal hospital.

”The hotel was not hit by shells but it was becoming much too dangerous to keep anyone there,” said Abdul Kabia, executive director of the U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR).

An estimated 9,000 refugees are already sheltering under U.N. protection at the King Faisal hospital in addition to 5,000 at the national Amahoro stadium near U.N. headquarters.

A U.N. convoy evacuated 32 foreigners from the International Committee of the Red Cross compound. They were driven to Kigali airport for a flight to Nairobi.

Rebels who went to abortive peace talks in Arusha, Tanzania, on Saturday announced a unilateral but conditional ceasefire from midnight (2200 GMT) on Monday. One condition is an end to all killings within 96 hours.

Diplomats said they doubted the government would be able to respond. ”The government is in complete disarray. It has a huge problem of coordination and communication between its ministers in Gityrama and its forces in the field,” one diplomat said.

The government fled to Gityrama, about 40 km (25 miles) southwest of Kigali, after rebel forces attacked the capital.

UNAMIR is cutting its forces in Rwanda on orders of the U.N. Security Council, which decided on Thursday only 270 members of the originally 2,500-strong force should remain.

Aid agencies say tens of thousands of civilians will be left without protection after the U.N. pullout.

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