

Cholera Claims 2,000 Rwandan Victims a Day in Refugee Camps

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By Sam Kiley in Mugunga Camp, Zaire.

RWANDAN refugees began to pour back into their homeland from the disease-ridden camps in Zaire yesterday as aid workers reported up to 2,000 people dying of cholera every day and said that the toll could reach 80,000.

A thousand Hutu peasants crossed back into Rwanda after Zaire's president reopened the border; thousands were said to be on the road, while still more were reported to have returned home through the bush.

The United Nations and the new Rwandan government have both appealed to refugees to go back, and the victorious Rwandan Patriotic Front has promised that there will be no reprisals against the Hutus.

Aid workers hope that yesterday's vanguard will be the start of a flood as the plight of refugees in the camps worsened in spite of the first of America's airdrops. Three C-130 aircraft flew 60,000lb of meat, flour, biscuits, rice and sugar from Entebbe in Uganda to the UNHCR north of Goma, but aid workers claimed that they had missed

their target. One pallet of almost hit a French military helicopter on the ground. A US military spokesman denied that the drop had been off-target.

Workers on the ground were still waiting for water the only hope of stopping cholera.

About 8,000 people are estimated to have died of the disease in stinking camps clouded with black mist from volcanic ash. "Things are going to get a lot, lot worse," Mike McDonough, of Concern Worldwide, said. "There is an immediate need for hundreds of aid workers. We simply cannot cope."

At the Mugunga camp, the team of 15 doctors and nurses ran out of intravenous fluids for treating cholera victims. "We will have to buy more in the town, where, as usual, we will be massively overcharged", Claude Morge of Medecins Sans Frontieres said. He was standing next to a 200 square yard area covered in corpses, and waiting for more lorries to arrive.

Israel is airlifting an 120-bed field hospital, 80 tonnes of medical supplies and a medical team to Goma.