

Rwanda: IRIN Emergency Update No. 265 on the Great Lakes

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IRIN Emergency Update No. 265 on the Great Lakes (Wednesday, 8 October 97)

RWANDA: Rebel attack on Gisenyi repulsed

Rwandan Hutu rebels attacked the western border town of Gisenyi today (Wednesday), but were repulsed after "heavy fighting", a government official told IRIN. Clashes, however, continued into the afternoon "not far from the town" as the army pursued the rebels into the hills. The sound of mortar fire was heard across the border in Goma. The government official denied initial reports the army had lost control of the airport. "There was fighting around the airport, but not in the airport," he said. An aid worker confirmed the airport remained in government hands. Casualty figures are at the moment unknown.

The official told IRIN the rebels - "a coalition of Interahamwe, ex-FAR and their allies" - approached the town last night before launching their attack early this morning. The rebels were based in the prefecture rather than coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), he said. Humanitarian sources say the rebels had been based on the Rwandan side of the Virunga forest. However, they then crossed into the DRC to sidestep the army before re-entering Rwanda to launch the attack.

According to humanitarian sources in Goma, 280 Rwandan refugees fled across the border to escape the fighting and were gathered at Goma airport. There were also reports by aid workers that the DRC army requisitioned vehicles in Goma - including a UNHCR truck - to transport their troops to the border.

Meanwhile, Hutu rebels killed 18 people in an attack on three separate families at Cyanika, 25 km northeast of Ruhengeri town on Monday night, the private Rwanda News Agency reported.

American nun testifies in war crimes trial

An American nun on Tuesday testified against a Rwandan district administrator standing trial for war crimes before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Sister Marie Farrington said it was "impossible" for Clement Kayishema to have been unaware of massacres committed in the western district of Kibuye in 1994, AFP quoted independent Radio Agatashya as reporting. Kayishema is being tried jointly with businessman Obed Ruzindana for genocide and crimes against humanity. Farrington, who heads the order of the Sisters of Saint Mary of Namur, arrived in Rwanda six-weeks after the civil war and genocide began.

Meanwhile, a Rwandan court-appointed lawyer specialising in defending suspected Rwandan war criminals was on Tuesday charged with committing acts of genocide. AFP said sources in Kigali described the arrest as a political move. Andre Bimenyimana was among a handful of people, with or without legal training, willing to defend war crime suspects. He is being held in Kigali's main prison. Last week the head of the Rwandan bar association said the independence of the legal profession was essential for "building a state of law."

Opposition party accuse Kigali of murdering activist

A Hutu opposition party on Saturday accused "elements" of the government army of murdering one of its activists, Jean-Baptiste Safari. The Forces of Resistance for Democracy (FRD) said Safari was gunned down at the gates of his home in Kigali. A statement from the group said he was killed for his political views. The statement was signed by former

Rwandan interior minister Seth Sendashonga.

Finance minister sacked

Rwandan President Pasteur Bizimungu on Tuesday sacked Minister of Finance and Planning Jean-Berchmans Birara. Donta Kaberuka, secretary of state at the ministry has been nominated as his replacement, the private Rwanda News Agency reported. No official reason was given for Birara's dismissal.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: Anti-UNHCR propaganda deplored

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Tuesday deplored radio and television broadcasts in eastern DRC which he said falsely accused UNHCR of arming Rwandan refugees. He reiterated his confidence in High Commissioner Sadaka Ogata and UNHCR staff in the region who he said had "performed with great courage and distinction in extremely difficult circumstances."

The anti-UNHCR media campaign has been particularly noticeable in Uvira. However, UNHCR said its staff in other offices have been placed "in a very difficult situation." On Monday, the agency encountered problems in flying its staff out of Goma in compliance with a government order to quit the town. Some equipment and personal belongings were confiscated by the authorities at the airport.

Secretary-General meets with investigation team

UN spokesman Fred Eckhard said on Tuesday that Annan had met with senior members of his human rights investigative team to the DRC. The Secretary-General asked them to consult with various departments in the Secretariat and formulate recommendations. He plans to meet with them again before deciding on a course of action, Eckhard said. The team spent more than five weeks in Kinshasa without being able to begin their mission to probe gross human rights violations.

Zambia postpones training of DRC police

The proposed training of DRC police officers by Zambia is on hold. Zambia's Home Affairs Minister Chitalu Sampa said on Monday the delay was because the relationship between the two governments was "still unstable", PANA reported. He told the Zambia News Agency that the two neighbours had common problems to sort out before a proposed joint cooperation commission is formed to guide bilateral relations. "But I'm still optimistic that it will not be long before the commission is formed and training of Congolese police officers started," Sampa said.

UGANDA: ADF kill 18 in Kasese

Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels killed 18 people and wounded seven in a night raid in western Uganda, AFP said quoting local press reports. The attack took place at Kyondo, Kasese district. Among the dead were two children and two pregnant women. Newspaper reports said the casualties were mainly civilians displaced by the rebels from the surrounding mountains.

British aid minister praises Museveni

Clare Short, Britain's secretary of state for international development, described President Yoweri Museveni as "a very fine man", AFP reported. Short, on her first official African tour, held talks with Museveni on Tuesday and later said there had been a "meeting of minds". She refused to be drawn on Uganda's "no-party" political model or the continued insurgency in the north of the country, AFP said. Short is due to arrive in Rwanda today.

Meanwhile, a contingent of military officers from six countries studying at Britain's Royal College of Defence Studies are currently visiting Uganda to study the country's defence concerns and security needs, the Kenyan daily 'The Nation' reported.

CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE: Fighting shifts to city centre

Forces of President Pascal Lissouba attacked the positions of his rival, Denis Sassou Nguesso, in the centre of Brazzaville, AFP said today. According to the news agency, the attack indicated Sassou Nguesso had gained ground in a three-pronged offensive launched yesterday. Meanwhile in Kinshasa, President Laurent-Desire Kabila reiterated on Tuesday that if the two rivals could not control soldiers of the former Zairean presidential guard he claimed were using Brazzaville as a base, "we will go in and do it ourselves." AFP also reported that a shell fired from Brazzaville landed west of Kinshasa but caused no casualties.

An embattled Lissouba arrived in Namibia on Monday on what national radio described as a private visit. He was expected to hold talks with Namibian President Sam Nujoma, the South African news agency reported.

TANZANIA: Cholera epidemic widens

A cholera epidemic has struck 17 out of Tanzania's 20 regions and killed more than 920 people since the beginning of the year, according to an official report. The worst-hit regions are Lindi, Mtwara, Morogoro, Dar es Salaam and the coast area. Cholera cases have also spread into the previously unaffected areas of Arusha and Mara. From 1 January to 18 September there have been 16,727 reported cases and 922 deaths. Half of the total fatalities occurred in the period between July and September.

An international aid worker told IRIN the most important aspect was not the number of cases, but the percentage of the population at risk. "If 17 regions out of 20 are reportedly affected, it's a serious matter," he said. He added the current drought was exacerbating the problem. A meningitis outbreak has also claimed 26 lives in Tanzania between July and 18 September.

Government urges Burundi to accept Nyerere mediation

The Tanzanian government has urged Burundian leader Major Pierre Buyoya to accept the mediation efforts of elder statesman Julius Nyerere and regional countries. National radio also reported on Tuesday that Prime Minister Frederick Sumaye said Tanzania did not want to see Buyoya's opponents seize power. Sumaye said he had toured several refugee camps for Burundians in Tanzania and had warned them not to get involved in politics on Tanzanian soil. Burundi has repeatedly alleged that Dar es Salaam backs Burundian Hutu rebels operating from the refugee camps and has accused former Tanzanian president Nyerere of being biased as a peace mediator.

SUDAN: Recruiting of school children to army defended

Sudan's defence minister has justified the deployment of high school students in battle against southern rebels on the basis of a shortage of regular troops, news agencies reported. "All fit students, after undergoing training, have been attached to various armed forces units to make up for the manpower shortage," Defence Minister Hassan Abdul Rahman Ali said in a statement to the National Assembly on Monday.

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