

UN troops swoop on refugee camps to arrest thugs

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KIGALI, Dec 14 (AFP) - UN troops launched massive pre-dawn raids on two refugee camps in southwestern Rwanda Wednesday to disarm and detain Hutu extremists who have been killing and wounding fellow refugees, UN spokesman Sammy Buo said.

He said around 2,000 troops went into the Kibeho and Ngago camps, adding that those detained for possessing weapons - about 25 by the middle of the day - would be turned over to the new Tutsi-led Rwandan authorities.

The operation was continuing late afternoon under the direction of the acting commander of the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), Brigadier General Henry Anyidoho of Ghana, who was on the spot, Buo said.

Doctors working for the international charity Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders) were

on standby at their hospitals in the region, but Buo said the operation was going smoothly.

No shots had been fired and the camp residents had welcomed the UN troops, he said, adding that normal humanitarian operations had been suspended for the day but would resume Thursday.

"There have been scenes of violence in the camps lately," Buo said. "The troops are weeding out those elements, and removing grenades and so on."

The troops had seized around 200 weapons, he said, mostly machetes and spears, using metal detectors to find those that had been hidden.

He added that the raids had been carried out after consultation with the new Tutsi-dominated government in Rwanda, but that no Rwandan troops were involved.

The camps in Rwanda - like those in neighbouring countries - harbour

members of the majority Hutu tribe who were defeated by the Tutsis in a savage civil war that ended in July after the Tutsis captured Kigali.

Members of the Hutu Interahamwe militias massacred hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and Hutu opponents – butchering men, women and children with machetes and garden hoes – and have since come to dominate many of the camps.

The Rwandan government is trying to close down all the camps within Rwanda, and has set December 31 as a deadline, but Buo said the UN force was trying to persuade the Hutus to return to their homes voluntarily, and hoped the government would agree to that approach.

”The deadline is not set in concrete,” he said.

Most of the the refugees – more than two million are in camps in neighbouring countries – have refused to return home after receiving reports, confirmed in some cases by the government, of revenge killings. Others have been forcibly prevented from going home so by the Hutu militias.

Buo said Wednesday’s raids would end that coercion, allowing the displaced persons in the camps to return to their homes if they so wanted.

A UNAMIR statement on Saturday said that ”over the last several weeks there has been an increase in the number of violent acts such as machete killings, grenade attacks, beatings and threats in and around displaced persons camps in southwestern Rwanda.

”Furthermore, many weapons and munitions are still being found in those camps, which jeopardizes security of displaced persons.

”Although UNAMIR troops are mandated to protect displaced Rwandans in camps and ... actively patrol these areas, criminal elements monitor UN movement and rarely commit violent acts in our presence,” it said.

”Preliminary investigations conducted by UN military observers indicate that most of these acts of violence are committed by well organised groups of bandits which in numerous cases are suspected to be members of either the former government forces or the Interahamwe.

”Furthermore, we have reason to believe that many of the killings are executions of people who witnessed the recent acts of genocide and of family members of Rwandans that have left the camps for their home communities.”

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