

Rwandan Rulers Warn Against Violence

Donatella Lorch

The New York Times, October 2, 1994

About 30,000 Rwandans jammed one of the capital's main stadiums today, pressing shoulder to shoulder or climbing atop walls to view several thousand former rebel soldiers on parade and hear an appeal from their new Government to refrain from seeking revenge.

Gen. Paul Kagame, Rwanda's Defense Minister and Vice President, warned the crowd against carrying out revenge killings of ethnic Hutu in retaliation for the widespread massacres of ethnic Tutsi across the country last spring.

"You must be careful not to wreak vengeance," he said. "I promise we will bring to justice those responsible for the massacres."

But General Kagame also lashed out at international aid agencies, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which has just compiled a report, still unreleased, accusing the new, Tutsi-dominated Government army of killing large numbers of Hutu in the southeast.

"Beware of foreigners who who preach ethnic divisions," said the Defense Minister and former rebel strategist. "We must make sure that genocide never happens again."

The address, traditional dances, army songs and the show of force at the rally marked the fourth anniversary of

the Tutsi-led rebel offensive, which first pushed into northern Rwanda from Uganda in 1990. But if today was the symbolic completion of the rebels' victory, it was also a celebration of a return to life in a country trying to be born again.

It was Kigali's first traffic jam since the city fell to the Rwandan Patriotic Front in early July. The women came in colorful, flowing long dresses, high heels and wore all the jewelry they could muster.

Cars, some still bullet-pocked, were decorated with eucalyptus branches, and the once-ragtag troops had on new if somewhat ill-matching uniforms. Many of the soldiers have given up their trademark knee-high black rubber boots and taken to wearing high-top sneakers with fluorescent stripes.

But if the mood in Kigali was joyous, it was shadowed by the huge problems facing Rwanda. Since word of the refugee agency's report began to circulate, the Rwandan Government has been struggling to quell a tide of fear that has virtually halted the return of Hutu refugees from camps in Zaire and Tanzania.

Massacres and a massive exodus have torn apart the country's social fabric; the concern stirred by the report make the prospects for rebuilding appear even more uncertain.

It is not clear whether the report prepared for the United Nations relief agency describes killings that occurred mainly during the civil war or after the new, Tutsi-dominated Government came to power in July. The Rwandan Government firmly denies any organized or coordinated reprisals by its troops.

United Nations military officers and relief workers have been forbidden to discuss the report. No one denies there are security problems in the southeast, especially banditry, or that rough roads and large stretches of marsh and parkland made it difficult to monitor events in remote villages.

Last week the United Nations sent about 90 Canadian and Ghanaian troops to the southeast to check on security. They have been patrolling the countryside around the clock with the help and cooperation of Rwandan Government troops.

"In the past 10 days in the southeast, United Nations soldiers have not sensed a tense atmosphere," said a United Nations military spokesman in Kigali, Maj. Jean-Guy Plante of Canada. "We are not in the business of conducting formal investigations. From our side of the coin we feel that the place is secure".

"People come up with all sorts of rumors," Major Plante said. "Perhaps 95 percent of them are not justified. There are people whether through radio or word of mouth that are deliberately trying to counter what the present Government and the United Nations are trying to achieve for the good of the people here."

Today the United Nations refugee agency said that while security in some

areas of Rwanda may be too shaky for the return of refugees, the biggest problem blocking repatriation is intimidation in refugee camps in eastern Zaire.

For weeks, former Hutu soldiers and militiamen have been discouraging Rwandans in the camps from leaving. On Friday, militiamen seized control of the entire camp of Katale, prompting international aid workers to flee.

"At the moment the situation in the camps is explosive," said Marjane Aalam, a field officer and spokeswoman for the United Nations refugee agency. "Few refugees are able to come back. They have to leave the camp secretly at night, and many have been killed. Ninety percent of the problem is related to the presence of ex-Government soldiers in these camps."

In Rwanda, the memories of the massacres carried out by Hutu soldiers like these are difficult to avoid. Torrential rains have been pounding the countryside, washing out dirt roads but also uncovering many of the shallow mass graves hastily dug near churches where Tutsi were massacred. As many as 500,000 people are estimated to have been slain between April and July.

The smell of death has not even completely left Kigali. At the Rwandan Patriotic Front's political headquarters, in a neighborhood that saw some of the heaviest fighting of the civil war, it sometimes wafts into a meeting room and lingers despite open windows and constant cleaning.

And as planes take off at the airport, the winds expose a spread-eagled skeleton that is sometimes obscured by the runway's uncut grass.