

# Rwandan rebels expect heavy resistance from army.

Mseteka, Buchizya

Reuters, April 8, 1994

BYUMBA, Rwanda, April 8 (Reuter) - Rwandan rebels expect heavy resistance if they advance on the capital Kigali where 600 fighters are reported to be battling government troops, a rebel spokesman said on Friday.

But Shaban Ruta, head of information for the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), declined to comment on reports that several thousand fighters were already advancing on the capital, now in the grip of savage tribal butchery.

A U.S. aid worker told the U.S. television network CNN by telephone that RPF fighters and government soldiers were battling on the streets of Kigali and that about 3,000 rebel reinforcements were on the way.

But he added he did not know from which direction they were coming or how close they were to the city.

U.N. officials in Kigali earlier quoted RPF members as saying rebels would move on the capital, raising the prospect of renewed civil war.

Ruta said RPF units in this northern RPF-controlled zone near the border with Uganda could reach Kigali in about 12 hours if they were "free-walking", but said he expected heavy resistance the entire way.

"The whole Rwandan army is concentrated along the front line," he said.

"If our Kigali battalion is really fighting, there must be action in the rear," he said.

The rebel frontline snakes through Rwanda from Ruhengeri in the northwest through Byumba to Mutara in the northeast.

RPF fighters, dug in around the parliament in Kigali, left their compound on Thursday and fought running battles with an elite presidential guard loyal to murdered President Juvenal Habyarimana.

Habyarimana and his Burundi counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira were killed on Wednesday night when a plane bringing them back from a regional peace summit was blown apart in a rocket attack.

The RPF unit was stationed in Kigali as part of a derailed peace accord reached last August between the rebels, supported by the minority Tutsi tribe, and Habyarimana of the majority Hutu tribe.

Since the presidents' deaths Kigali has been plunged into an orgy of tribal bloodletting. The Tutsi prime minister was killed on Thursday by soldiers.

The Rwandan armed forces said in a statement broadcast by Rwandan radio that a rebel attack on the presidential guard barracks had been repulsed.

“RPF soldiers at the Kimihurura parliament building left it and launched an attack on the presidential guard barracks but the attack was repulsed,” the report said, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Independent confirmation of the report was not available.

The rebel spokesman said that if RPF forces reached Kigali he expected they would meet little resistance.

“Already, there are reports of infighting within the forces there, even within the presidential guard,” he said.

The RPF has denied responsibility for the rocket attack on the presidents’ plane.

“We never thought killing Habyarimana was the best way. You risk turning him into a hero,” said Ruta.

(c) Reuters Limited 1994