

Planned Rwanda peace talks collapse in Tanzania

Hartley, Aidan

Reuters, April 24, 1994

ARUSHA, Tanzania, April 24 (Reuter) - Plans for peace talks to end civil war and tribal slaughter in Rwanda collapsed on Sunday with a rebel leader refusing to negotiate and a government delegation failing to arrive.

"I'm leaving for Nairobi," Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) Secretary-General Theogene Rudasingwa told reporters before walking out of the hotel in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha where the talks were supposed to take place.

Tanzanian officials said a Rwandan government delegation to the peace talks, called by Tanzania and originally supposed to start on Saturday, never arrived in Arusha and had vanished.

Even before leaving by road for the Kenyan capital, Rudasingwa insisted he had no intention of meeting any members of a Rwandan government team as the rebels did not recognise the government.

He said he came to Arusha only to brief Organisation of African Unity Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim and Tanzanian officials on a RPF declaration of a unilateral ceasefire from Monday.

Officials said Tanzanian Prime Minister John Malecela tried in vain to persuade Rudasingwa to stay and talk with the government delegation – whenever it managed to arrive.

The talks were called last week by Tanzania to end civil war and massacres that have occurred since Rwanda's President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in a rocket attack on his plane on April 6.

The president of neighbouring Burundi died in the same plane crash.

U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said on Thursday he saw no chance of a ceasefire being agreed between the RPF and government in coming days so the U.N. Security Council voted to withdraw most U.N. forces from Rwanda.

The RPF strongly opposes the government set up by survivors of Habyarimana's political party and blames it for the killing of countless thousands in tribal fighting that followed his death.

A three-man government delegation was reported to have left the southwest Rwandan town of Gityrama, where the self-declared interim government fled when rebels attacked the capital Kigali.

Tanzanian officials said the team had crossed the Zairean border to Goma on Saturday. But U.N. officials said a plane sent to Zaire to bring them to Arusha

on Saturday found no one.

Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh, U.N. special representative to Rwanda, said that as far as he was concerned there was no ceasefire – indicating his anger that the RPF had failed to inform the United Nations officially of its move on Saturday.

Tanzania sponsored 11 months of negotiations between the RPF and Rwandan government in Arusha that concluded last year with an agreement to end three years of civil war.

Rudasingwa said the ceasefire would take effect without conditions but would not be sustained unless terms were met, including the ending of all killings by government forces and militias within 96 hours.

Human rights workers estimate 100,000 people have been killed and two million displaced this month – most of them opposition party supporters and members of Rwanda's minority Tutsi clan.

(c) Reuters Limited 1994