

Rwandan rebels shun ceasefire ceremony in Zaire

Wrong, Michela

Reuters, April 25, 1994

KINSHASA, April 24 (Reuter) - A Rwandan government team said on Sunday it had signed a ceasefire agreement brokered by Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko but the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) had failed to turn up.

The four-member delegation, making a surprise appearance in the Zairean capital, said it had flown to Mobutu's palace at Gbadolite, 1,150 km (700 miles) north of Kinshasa, to sign a ceasefire agreement due to come into force on Sunday.

But it said the rebels, who originally asked Mobutu to mediate between the two sides and had previously approved the document drawn up by the Zairean president, never put in an appearance.

"We were surprised by the FPR's absence," said Rwandan Communications Minister Andre Ntagerura.

"We don't know why the FPR did not present itself. We hope it was for reasons out of its control."

Asked why the Rwandan government had failed to send a delegation to peace talks scheduled to take place in Arusha in Tanzania this weekend, which were attended by the FPR, Ntagerura said the government had been plagued by communications and transport problems.

He added that the FPR had gone to Arusha simply to make a declaration and not to negotiate peace.

The Zairean-brokered ceasefire was due to come into force on Sunday at midday. Ntagerura said the Rwandan government had not given up hope on a ceasefire, but considered it would have to be signed by both sides before it could be applied.

"We consider that if the FPR has not signed the accord in Gbadolite, it could still do so fairly soon. It could already have done so," he said.

The delegation, which included Justice Minister Agnes Ntamabyaliro, Health Minister Casimir Bizimungu and Army Brigadier General Marcel Gatsinzi, insisted it wanted peace.

But it rejected a series of rebel conditions, ranging from the dissolution of the government to the disbanding of the presidential guard and closure of the pro-government Thousand Hills radio station.

"The RPF will soon realise that these demands fly in the face of legality and democratic principles," said Ntamabyaliro.

Asked how rebel forces had managed to penetrate so swiftly into Kigali, the delegation claimed they were receiving active support from both Uganda and Belgians in the U.N. peacekeeping contingent, and reiterated claims that three Belgian soldiers shot down the plane carrying the Rwanda and Burundi presidents.

"Only Belgian members of UNAMIR owned the missiles used to down the plane, they were the only ones in the whole city of Kigali," said Bizimungu.

Asked for proof of Belgian involvement in the April 6 explosion, he added that Belgian soldiers had been responsible for airport security and local residents who rushed to the airport after the incident found Belgian soldiers there covered in mud.

"I think these facts suffice in themselves," he said.

Brigadier-general Gatsinzi accused Belgian peacekeepers of killing Rwandan army soldiers and claimed that white mercenaries had been spotted fighting on the rebel side and several had been killed.

UNAMIR, he added, was guilty of transporting RPF troops to strategic military positions in its vehicles and turning a blind eye when the rebels smuggled in weapons into the demilitarised zone before the outbreak of hostilities.

Gatsinzi also claimed that neighbouring Uganda had sent two battalions of soldiers – the Simba and 21st battalion – to fight on the rebel side and was supplying the RPF with heavy artillery and weapons by air.

The delegation, which is due to return to Kigali in the next few days, denied press reports that several Rwandan ministers had fled across the national frontier.

"The government is still working in Rwanda, and above all, it is still in the capital," Ntagerura said.

(c) Reuters Limited 1994