

Rwanda fighting claims « dozens of lives » : report

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NAIROBI, March 9 (AFP) – Tribal clashes have claimed “dozens of lives” in southeast Rwanda’s Bugesera region, where the government has imposed emergency measures, several sources reached by telephone from Nairobi said Monday.

The official death toll of 20 in fighting that broke out last Wednesday “is far from the truth”, one well-informed source said. “There have certainly been several dozen other casualties”.

Fires raged Sunday around a Roman Catholic mission at Nyamata, where more than 6,000 of the minority Tutsi tribe took refuge after fleeing their homes in the hills of the small east central African nation, an eyewitness said.

The majority Hutu government Sunday banned all meetings of more than three people in the region, imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew and began patrols by troops and gendarmes.

Witnesses said hundreds of houses had been razed to the ground and the Tutsi refugees lacked food aid. Some were “still trying to protect their land and their women,” a diplomat said.

The diplomat dismissed a claim Sunday by a Rwandan human rights committee in Brussels that there were no medical workers in the region, home to some 300,000 people.

“Missionaries are there as well as the Belgian and Rwandan Red Cross, Rwandan scouts and the Caritas humanitarian organisation,” he said.

The rights committee based in the former colonial capital on Sunday put the death at 30 identified bodies, but stated that estimates of the number of victims range “from several dozen to more than 300”.

Tension between the Tutsi and the Hutu has mounted in Bugesera and Kanzenze, south of the capital Kigali, since the opposition Liberal Party held a rally on March 1.

Rwandan officials suspect the party of being the internal wing of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR), a rebel movement of mainly Tutsi former exiles who invaded the country from Uganda in October 1990.

The FPR has since then kept up a sporadic guerrilla campaign against the authorities, who recently authorised nine new political movements in initial moves away from single-party military rule towards democracy.

A diplomat said Rwandan officials “most deeply regretted” the latest violence, but added that “on the spot, Hutus are going around with machetes in their hands”.

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