

# Church Fails To Sever Ties With 'killers'

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**By Chris McGreal in Goma, Zaire.**

Rwanda's Anglican Archbishop, Augustin Nshamihigo, represented most of his congregation's views well, those that were not dead. The archbishop was good at rattling out the reasoning behind the slaughter of the Tutsis. He offered it as a historical explanation, but to many it sounded like a justification.

Archbishop Nshamihigo's Roman Catholic counterpart paid with his life for his close ties to Rwanda's bloodied former regime when the Rwandan Patriotic Front laid its hands on him. The Anglican archbishop still mingles with those accused of mass murder, meeting regularly in Goma with leaders of the defunct government wanted by the United Nations for crimes against humanity.

Other senior religious leaders believe the church has an important role to play mediating a political settlement and reconciliation, but that it cannot do so until it sheds its links with the former government.

One senior church official said those with continuing close ties to the defunct regime are an obstacle to a comprehensive political solution.

"Certain members of the church at high level are very close to the [former] government. We are trying to make a

difference at the lower level, trying to lessen the power of those still very close to the government. The control of the former government is still very strong," the church official said.

The Anglican archbishop declined to be interviewed but a source close to him said that although he has maintained contact with members of the former regime, the archbishop is distressed at the perception that he in any way defended the massacres.

In Nairobi in June, the archbishop refused to condemn those responsible for the massacres and blamed the humanitarian crisis on the RPF. "I don't want to condemn one group without condemning the other," he said.

There has been considerable resistance at all levels within both churches to admitting that the genocide of the Tutsis was organised. While some priests paid with their lives to save Tutsis, it is perhaps no coincidence that many people were murdered inside church buildings. Some church officials did not understand why they were shunned on visits abroad in search of assistance.

Some church officials are attempting to organise inside the refugee camps, to build tolerance and allay the refugees' fears of Rwanda's new government. They are also establishing indirect links with the RPF adminis-

tration in Kigali. But it is a difficult task in the face of the militias' campaign of fear to keep people from going home.

The churches are cautious. Few clergymen who fled with the refugees have returned to Rwanda and, in addressing past crimes, the churches are still hesitant to tell people what they do not want to hear.

"The wounds are deep. We have to go step by step. It could take years. The church has to tread carefully. The militias are still powerful and there is no point in head-on confrontation. But the people have to know they did bad things, to repent, and to approach those to whom they did bad things, the relatives of those they killed. They must accept that they did wrong, they must change their ways of living," the church official said.

The British charity Christian Aid is backing efforts of those Rwandan church leaders seeking to break ties

with the former regime and find a negotiated settlement.

"We are calling for a diplomatic mission on the scale of the humanitarian effort. Only a political solution can work and there's no point in rushing into it. There's no use sending people back very, very quickly because it'll just happen again. We'd like to have a lasting solution involving the regional community and the rest of the international community," Christian Aid's Ama Annan said in Goma.

In doing so the charity too has had to distance itself from some church leaders.

"The church itself has identified those people with which it doesn't wish to be associated. We are working with the elements within the church who are moderate and have been calling for tolerance and peace. We are very clear we will not work with anyone who has been identified with the massacres," she said.