

Tutsi Refugees Face Choice Of Starvation Or Being Murdered.

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From Sam Kiley in Gitarama, Rwanda.

TUTSI refugees crowding the camps around the seat of the Rwandan government have a grim choice : stay inside and face starvation or try to leave and face murder.

Inside the camp a young man explained. "The army and the militia kill anyone who leaves the camp. We men are starving and sometimes sneak out to look for food. But if you leave, you will never come back. Here we die from starvation and disease."

About a dozen people were dying in the camp each day. In Kabgayi four corpses lay unburied in the mud. Yet Rwanda's putative minister of primary and secondary education, speaking only minutes after the murder of a man a few hundred yards away, insisted : "The Rwandan people are peaceful. The militia is disciplined and have been armed to weed out Tutsi extremist infiltrators sent by the (rebel) Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF). The Tutsi want to exterminate the Hutu."

It was Augustin Bizimana, the Defence Minister, who became the first government member to admit that the Hutu population had tried to exterminate the Tutsi. "When the President (Juvénal Habyarimana) was killed in April the people were very angry. They feared that they would be wiped out by the Tutsi and RPF infiltrators," he said. "But it is clear that many, many innocent people were also killed Tutsi who supported us and Tutsi who had never heard of the RPF. I regret that deeply. I was almost killed by a mob when I tried to deliver a message to the Prime Minister." The minister, who also admitted that he did not know if the government would be able to hold Kigali, the capital, against the rebel attacks, insisted that the armed forces were regaining

control of the militias.

"It is very difficult to end these hatreds," he said. "The UN should start by separating the belligerents and starting talks to end the war. But the ultimate solution must be between the people. There must be an end to the vicious circle."

In Gitarama, the Hutu headmistress of a local high school who had complained about the rape of her pupils was hacked to death, as was another woman who had the misfortune to look like the teacher. Kabgayi, near Gitarama, is known as the Vatican of Rwanda. One man trying to bring some succour to those cut off from regular food supplies is Father Vieko Curic, a Franciscan priest, who manages to talk food supplies past sceptical fighters manning roadblocks.

At one roadblock, two sweaty-faced figures emerged from the banana plantation, one carrying a club with a head the size of a football, the other a 4ft machete. Both had blood spatters on their arms and chests. "Salut," the priest said as if greeting old friends. Under his breath, he uttered "Salop", meaning swine.

Grumbling along behind him were three lorryloads of food donated by the World Food Programme to their only, and unpaid, representative in Rwanda for distribution among the few thousand Tutsi who have survived the tribal pogrom, which has killed several hundred thousand of their clansmen in a few weeks. With a mixture of bonhomie, banter, and extravagant cajoling, he was going to get the food through 30 roadblocks on the 100-mile road between the border with Burundi and Kabgayi.