

‘I Saw Hills Covered With Bodies Resembling Lawns Of Flesh’

Sam Kiley

The Times, 14 mai 1994

UNITED Nations plans to send a force to Rwanda, after tribal slaughter has claimed an estimated half a million lives, were scorned yesterday as a mission too small in scope, too late and doomed to failure by veteran foreign aid workers who are still daring to work in the country.

The head of a UN organisation, who has been reprimanded twice for breaking safety rules by crossing into the fighting in Rwanda from neighbouring Burundi, summed up the feelings of veterans of UN military adventures. “I was in Somalia. I’ve already seen this movie and it’s bad. What can the UN do here with a few thousand men? Almost all the Tutsi are dead or have fled the country.

“When they could have done something (after the deaths of the Rwandan and Burundian Presidents in a plane crash last month) they ran away,” he said. The Security Council has set itself a deadline of the end of this week to decide on whether, and how, to send a boosted peacekeeping mission back to Rwanda. This comes after a month of killings, the third such wave in as many decades. In Gitarama, where street killings are a daily routine, Father Vieko Curic, the only white man to have stayed in the country south of Kigali, the capital, had harsher words : “The UN failed in the beginning and now it is trying to save face. Does it know where to send its soldiers on their humanitarian mission ?” Father Curic, who has worked in Rwanda for 11 years, witnessed “thousands of murders” of Tutsi and moderate Hutu at the hands of the marauding gangs of militia known as interahamwe “those who attack together”.

The Franciscan father saw several hills covered with bodies resembling “lawns of flesh”. When he drove the 70 miles between Gitarama and Butare in

the south, he saw a corpse every yard. “I believe that at least half a million people were killed. Look at the statistics there were about two million Tutsi in Rwanda, some 80,000 have fled, a few thousand remain in camps. Where are the rest ? Is there any point in coming when there is almost none left to save ?”

As the criticism of the United Nations mounted, a UN official reported in Nairobi that 88 Rwandan students were massacred in the government-held southern town of Gikongoro. Seven other people were hacked to death with machetes in the capital.

Bangladesh and Australia have offered troops for the 5,500-man force proposed by Boutros Boutros Ghali, the UN Secretary-General. But their mission, relief organisation, is probably impossible. “To bring security one would have to put a soldier on every one of Rwanda’s hills, perhaps outside every hut,” Chris Hennemeyer, director of the American-based Catholic Relief Services, said.

London : Oxfam and six other aid agencies launched an appeal yesterday to help Rwandan refugees.