

# Millions flee Rwanda as RPF claims victory

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ROBERT BLOCK in Kigali

THE war in Rwanda is supposedly over. The military commander of the rebel Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), Major-General Paul Kagame, yesterday announced that his mainly Tutsi forces had routed the extremist Hutu government army and were now the undisputed victors of one of history's bloodiest conflicts.

'We have captured all of Rwanda up to the French protection zone (in the south-west of the country) and the ceasefire is effectively in place,' a confident-looking General Kagame told journalists in the Rwandan capital. Dressed in fatigues, General Kagame said that he hoped that an end to the fighting would stop the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans which is overwhelming relief agencies and threatening a humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented scale.

Yet despite the apparent good news, serious doubts remain over whether the war is really over or just entering a new phase. UN officials and relief workers say that a ceasefire in itself is no longer enough to reconcile a country so badly divided. A ceasefire may silence the guns but it will do little to heal the country and stem the bloodshed unless the RPF can win Hutu hearts and minds.

The announcement of the truce did

little to stem the tidal wave of humanity fleeing Rwanda. The flow of displaced people has now been joined by Rwandans who have taken refuge in the French 'safety zone'. Already 100,000 people have crossed from south-west Rwanda to the Zairean border town of Bukavu, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross. UN sources say that another 1.3 million people are on the roads, heading for Cyangugu, the Rwandan town just across the border from Bukavu.

An estimated 1 million Hutus have already crossed into Goma, Zaire, further north. The influx of another 1 million people to Bukavu will completely sabotage the already inadequate international humanitarian response. 'This has the potential of being far worse than what is happening up there (in Goma),' said Charles Petrie of the UN Rwanda Emergency Office. The RPF now says that there is no need for a protection zone since the militias and the Hutu army have now been routed. They are demanding access to the area where former Hutu government officials deemed responsible for orchestrating the slaughter of 500,000 people, mainly Tutsis, have taken refuge.

The RPF have warned the French intervention forces that they intend to capture the 'clique of killers' whom the

rebels say are being shielded by the French. The French say they will not tolerate any RPF incursions into the area.

But a possible showdown with the French may be the least of the RPF's problems. General Kagame and his RPF army now face the formidable task of convincing millions of displaced Hutus, many of whom participated in massacres of Tutsis, that they are welcome to return and safe from retribution.

But so far the RPF victory does not provide much optimism for reconciliation. Although about 20,000 Hutus and Tutsis have returned to Kigali, there is still an air of unease hanging over the city. Arrogant young rebel soldiers man checkpoints throughout the town. There have been reports of looting of Hutu houses by RPF troops in the capital and several incidents of abuse of Hutu men.

The RPF's success may have inadvertently recreated similar conditions to those of 1959 when the Hutus, rebelling against centuries of Tutsi domination, killed 100,000 Tutsis and drove another 200,000 into exile in Uganda.

The inability of the Tutsis to go home provided the pretext for the creation of the RPF and the start of its armed struggle to return with a refugee army. The war in turn eventually led to the massacres of Tutsis over the last three months.

Already there are signs that the refugee camps outside Rwanda are being used as bases for Hutu extremist incursions into the country. Relief workers in Ngara refugee camp in Tanzania report that for the past week about 15 new bodies - supposedly those of Tutsis - are once again flowing down the Kigare river from Rwanda every day.

In an attempt to reassure the Hutus of their good intentions, the RPF has named a Hutu, Pasteur Bizimungu, as the new president of the country and has also appointed a Hutu prime minister. But many observers, including senior UN officials, think that Hutus will view them as RPF puppets. 'The only way the RPF can convince the Hutus to return is to stop all military action, allow the safe zone to remain intact and avoid the kind of incident like the mortar attack on Goma,' said one UN official.