

Rebels partly blame outside world for crisis

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MULINDI, Rwanda, April 10 (Reuters) – Rwandan rebels say the international community bears a heavy responsibility for the current bloodshed after naively trying to force the remote central African state into a western-style democracy.

“The West and the United Nations have in some way contributed to this situation,” said the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) vice-chairman Patrick Mazimhaka.

The RPF is moving 4,000 fighters towards Kigali to fight government forces who are on a killing spree after President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundi leader Cyprien Ntaryamira were killed in a rocket attack on their plane last Wednesday.

“The military option has been forced on us,” Mazimhaka said.

Nine months ago, African diplomats boasted they had pulled off a “Stamped in Africa” peace deal between Habyarimana’s government and the RPF to end a civil war that erupted when the rebels invaded from Uganda in October 1990.

Western donors made clear that they would withhold economic aid from the impoverished country if they settled their quarrel on the battlefield rather than around the negotiating table.

The RPF accuse France of prop-

ping up Habyarimana’s power base until Paris withdrew the troops last year. On Saturday, the French returned, this time only to evacuate foreign nationals.

As in many other African countries, the West demanded the creation of a multi-party system supposed to lead to accountable and representative government, political experts say.

Instead, multi-party systems have often led to ethnic strife and at the same time failed to stamp out corruption or human rights abuses in the world’s poorest continent.

“The West insists on a multi-party system before the creation of democratic mechanisms which could sustain one. It is naive, dangerous and irresponsible,” said a senior U.N. source.

A 2,500-strong United Nations observer mission was deployed in Rwanda to monitor a ceasefire on the northern battle front and oversee the transition to multi-party elections in 1995, also as part of that peace deal.

But since December, many African political analysts blame Habyarimana for obstructing the establishment of a new interim government.

The RPF blames the U.N. for not pressuring Habyarimana into respecting deadlines for a broad-based multi-party transitional government supposed to have been in place by February.

“Habyarimana was just playing for time, he had no intention of respecting the agreement and the U.N. and the West went along with it,” said one African analyst.

Human rights groups have charged that large quantities of weapons were secretly being imported ahead of possible violence between the majority Hutu tribe and the former feudal overlord minority Tutsi community.

Under the peace deal, a broad-based government was to include RPF members, thousands of refugees were to be allowed home and rebel forces would have been incorporated into a national military.

Now that peace accord is in tatters.

RPF commander-in-chief Major-General Paul Kagame said in a statement on Saturday that his forces would hunt down the “murderers” from government forces and Habyarimana’s ruling party.

The RPF is dominated by Tutsis, who make up just 15 percent of the population.

Many of the rebels had lived in exile for years after fleeing uprisings by the Hutus.

Guerrilla leaders say that they have support from the Hutus yet not a single civilian can be seen living in the areas they control in northern Rwanda.

The RPF is aligned with opposition parties supported by Hutus from the south of the country who are poorer and from Hutu clans other than Habyarimana’s northwestern homeland of Gisenyi.

RPF leaders say they do not object to a multi-party system when the Rwandan people are ready for it.

Political analysts draw a parallel between that RPF position and the beliefs of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni – thought to be the rebels’ main military backer – that one movement should rule the country through consensus until the threat of ethnic strife has been removed from peoples’ memories.

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