

Rwanda Plans to Try Thousands For Massacres, New Leader Says

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The Prime Minister of Rwanda said today that his newly installed Government would proceed with war crimes trials of members of the ousted Government and thousands of civilians suspected of taking part in genocidal attacks and other human rights violations during the recent civil war.

“We are not going to wait for long for an international tribunal to be held,” Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu said. “It can take more than three years for the United Nations to organize an international tribunal, and people will think we are playing around here.”

He did not say how early the first of the war crimes trials could be held. But some diplomats and United Nations officials who are based in Kigali speculated that it would take months, at least, for the country’s judicial system to return to a level at which it could conduct such trials.

Most of the officials of the former Government, as well as many army and militia members, have fled to Zaire and other neighboring countries, and it is uncertain whether they would be returned to stand trial.

Mr. Twagiramungu said today that anyone who could be identified as a killer, whether military or civilian,

would be tried and, if convicted, likely shot. That method of execution is reserved exclusively in Rwanda for defendants convicted of genocidal killings. Punishment in other capital cases is normally by hanging.

“I’m not a lawyer, but I think if you kill, you simply kill,” the Prime Minister said. “The people involved in giving orders are just as guilty as the people killing. There are no clean people involved in massacres.”

The new Government has asked the United Nations to convene an international tribunal to study the killings and human rights abuses that occurred during the Rwandan civil war, but United Nations officials have roundly criticized the idea.

A United Nations officer posted here, who spoke on condition that he not be identified, said the scale of prosecutions that the Rwandans have proposed would take years to complete, cost tens of millions of dollars and stir the ethnic hatreds between Hutu and Tutsi that led to the recent killings.

“It’s not just organized killing by the former Government,” the United Nations official said. “In the end, there were mothers with children strapped to their backs killing mothers with children strapped to their backs, and 10-

year-old children killing other children. You could be talking about 200,000 people.” Mr. Twagiramungu rejected the argument.

Comparison to World War II

“I don’t know what happened in France after the war, or in Germany,” he said, “But those nations pushed national unity while still trying war criminals. Why did it happen there and it can’t happen here?”

Mr. Twagiramungu, a Canadian-trained economist, became Prime Minister and head of the new Rwandan Government on July 18, the same day that the victorious rebel army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, claimed victory in the civil war and declared a cease-fire against the routed army of the former Government.

The Prime Minister met with journalists for about an hour today after spending several hours talking with the American Under Secretary of State for African Affairs, George Moose. “We have given him assurances that we want a cooperative and inclusive Government,” Mr. Twagiramungu said.

The Prime Minister himself is not a member of the Patriotic Front, most of whose rank and file are members of the minority Tutsi tribe, and he has fiercely denied that he is a puppet of the Patriotic Front. He is from the Hutu majority, and although he split with the dominant Hutu nationalist party in 1991, he served as recently as 1993 as interim Prime Minister in a Hutu-controlled Government.

But Mr. Twagiramungu all but precluded any other senior political or mi-

litary leaders of the ousted Government from becoming part of the new Government, saying that the victorious rebels held them accountable for the massacres of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans.

Policy of Integration

“Our policy is to integrate,” he said. “But if people think we’re going to integrate people who massacred, they are wrong. They must go another way, toward justice.”

Like Mr. Twagiramungu, the President, Pasteur Bizimungu, is a Hutu. Of the 17 Cabinet posts, only 8 were awarded to Rwandan Patriotic Front members. But it is suspected that much of the real power in Rwanda nowadays is in the hands of the leader of the front, Gen. Paul Kagame.

Publicly, General Kagame has played a low-key role since leading his forces to victory. He has left it exclusively to the Prime Minister and the President to make state visits, meet diplomats and to talk with reporters. But General Kagame, a Tutsi, kept command of his army and awarded himself two of the most powerful positions in Government, Defense Minister and Vice President.

Leaders of the former Government have made almost daily threats of renewing the civil war from their haven in Zaire. “That is an empty threat,” Mr. Twagiramungu said. “They are not in a position to fight and win. They can destabilize, because guerrilla warfare is not the monopoly of the R.P.F. But they cannot win.”

Plans to Visit Refugee Camps

The Prime Minister said that when he felt it was safe to do so, he intended to make a trip to the Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire to appeal to his countrymen to return home. Thousand of Rwandans – including about 200 former officers and soldiers – have returned to Rwanda in the last week, he said, but the bulk of the 1.2 million

refugees, most of them Hutu, have remained in Zaire, afraid that they will be subject to Tutsi reprisals if they go home.

Mr. Twagiramungu said today that President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire had told him that all the Rwandan soldiers in Zaire had been disarmed and that the tanks and other heavy equipment that they had taken with them had been confiscated and would be returned to the new Government in Kigali.