

# Tutsis Returning by the Thousands After Generations of Exile

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BUTARE, Rwanda (AP) – A lost nation of Tutsi exiles is returning by the thousands to the country that once meant death for them.

Some of the returnees haven't seen the country since 1959, when a violent rebellion by the majority Hutus ended centuries of domination and drove tens of thousands of Tutsis into neighboring nations.

Now, Tutsi exiles are flooding back, arriving by the bus-load and on foot, congregating at government processing centers, moving into abandoned homes and bringing with them the old fears of minority domination.

After surviving the April massacres that killed as many as 500,000 people, most of them Tutsis, and ousting the Hutu government with a rebel army last month, this returning diaspora is moving into areas largely abandoned by Hutus.

Hundreds of thousands of Hutus now live in misery and fear in the

squalid, deadly camps in Zaire, Tanzania and in the section of southwestern Rwanda carved out by the French army.

There is very little traffic between the French security zone, populated overwhelmingly by Hutus, and the areas that surround it run by the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front.

With the French preparing to leave on Aug. 22, relief agencies fear the Hutus in the security zone could flee en masse into Bukavu, in eastern Zaire, rivaling the catastrophe of last month's exodus into Goma, Zaire.

Very few Hutus in the French zone city of Gikongoro are willing to travel the 12 miles to the tilled fields and open spaces around Butare, which is filling up quickly with Tutsis.

Many are driven here both by the RPF victory and the worsening ethnic conflict between Tutsis and Hutus in Burundi to the south.

"The situation in Burundi has become unbearable, but even if it wasn't I would return to Rwanda," said Faustin Gesgona, 62, as he cleared rubble from a battered store in downtown Butare.

"This is where my family will live now that the RPF is in charge."

Gesgona arrived on Saturday for the first time since his family fled in 1960. He said the new local government assigned him the store as temporary living quarters.

In Gitarama to the north, Dr. Fred Tagwa, 34, came from Uganda last week and drifted among the empty buildings, looking for a place to bring his family. His parents fled the anti-Tutsi purges of 1959 and Tagwa was making his first visit to the country.

"My parents come from the villages in the hills, but I have no desire to go there," the physician said. "The killers are still there."

Though the Tutsis and Hutus are trying to negotiate an orderly aftermath to the French departure - the French soldiers already are being replaced by U.N. peacekeepers from Chad and Ghana - they also are waging a Cold War-style propaganda campaign against each other.

French officers in Gikongoro said there have been repeated instances of Hutus being killed when they tried to cross into the RPF zone.

"We know people are being

killed," said Lt. Col. Erik de Stabenrath, the French commander in Gikongoro.

Last week, Stabenrath gave a U.N. human rights team reports of alleged RPF-sanctioned massacres of returning Hutus, including the purported killings of 63 people who had spent the night in the Butare veterinary school.

Each of the reports was based on an account by a Hutu refugee who claimed to have witnessed the killings and then fled back to the French zone.

Stabenrath also said he saw the bodies of 15 dead Hutu civilians he said were killed by RPF soldiers near the city of Kunin. Pressed for details, he said he saw the bodies from a helicopter and assumed they were killed by rebels because they had just seized the area.

The assistant prefect of Butare, Boniface Ukuri, called the allegations "malicious propaganda" from a French government that armed and financed the former Hutu government.

He also denied that the RPF was preventing Hutus from returning home or giving their homes to the arriving Tutsis.

He would not, however, allow a reporter to visit the veterinary school because he said his boss was out of town.

Ukuri and other national officials acknowledge there have been isolated

and unauthorized reprisal killings, and that suspected killers have been arrested. But they deny there is an organized campaign of vengeance.

At the refugee camps north of Gikongoro, some Hutus say they tried to return to their homes in the RPF zone and instead narrowly escaped being murdered in their native villages.

At the Kaduha camp, Victor Rurangirwa, 36, said he returned last week to his village of Nyarugenge and was taken prisoner by RPF soldiers.

He said 20 people were slaughtered with garden hoes, but he managed to escape and return to the camp 50 miles away. He supplied a list of six victims he said he knew.

In Nyarugenge, where both returning Tutsis and Hutus were living in seeming calm, people from both groups said they were unaware of any reprisal killings.

"I feel safe with the soldiers here," said Evode Nodayisenga, 19, a Hutu from one of the small villages around Ntongwe, where many of the Kaduha camp dwellers say there have been bloody revenge killings.

He said he attended meetings where local Tutsis and Hutus gather so the survivors of killings can name the killers and take them off to jail.

"It's no problem here for the normal people. Only the killers," he said.

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