

Drunken mobs, pile of dead share Kigali streets

Smerdon, Peter

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KIGALI, April 10 (Reuter) - Drunken soldiers and gangs of machete-wielding youths share the streets of the hilly Rwandan capital Kigali with piles of mutilated, rotting corpses.

Crowds of youths armed with sticks, kitchen knives, anything capable of slashing open a human body, stand solemnly in the the roads.

Corpses are piled in the centres of streets. Corpses are laid out in lines on the sides of roads.

Bodies are everywhere.

In the compounds of luxurious villas. On the doorsteps in shantytowns.

Men in dresses and bright track-suits. Children with gruesome wounds.

The air smells sickly sweet.

Red Cross officials fear that tens of thousands of men, women and children died in three days of tribal bloodletting in this lush, green city in the heart of Africa.

Teams of government workers in orange overalls, escorted by soldiers, began collecting the bodies on Sunday.

The soldiers were irritable and tense.

The burial crews worked quickly, dumping the dead into mass graves before disease can start to spread.

Although usually drunk, the young men in the mobs seemed to feel the pride of their killings turn to shame.

They threatened visitors. We left quickly through a maze of roadblocks made from iron bars and branches.

The killing squads say their checkpoints were set up to protect their neighbourhoods. But the barriers prevented the escape of the neighbours they hunted down.

The Kigali massacres were remarkable in the size and ferocity even for Rwanda.

Rwanda, whose scenic beauty once earned it the name "the Switzerland of Africa", has a history written in blood. Hundreds of thousands have died in tribal massacres between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi, once the country's feudal overlords.

Justice Minister Agnes Ntamaeyariro admits many of those killed remain hidden in homes – often with survivors too terrified to move either themselves or the dead.

Only a few blocks from the Hotel De Diplomatic where representatives of an interim government talk of peace, a dozen young men lay spreadeagled in the blood-stained dust.

Horrific stab wounds marked their bodies.

Fifteen minutes later, the dead had disappeared, thrown like sacks into large trucks and driven out to mass grave on the edge of the city, which had a population of 200,000 before the killings began.

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