

Rwanda rebels declare ceasefire

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ARUSHA, Tanzania, April 24 (Reuter) - Rwandan rebels declared a unilateral ceasefire in fighting government forces on Saturday, upstaging internationally-brokered peace talks which did not even begin.

"They all want a ceasefire. Well, they have one," rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) Secretary-General Theogene Rudasingwa told Reuters in Tanzania's northern town of Arusha where peace talks were supposed to take place.

But Rudasingwa refused to meet a government delegation which had not yet even turned up late on Saturday, saying he had only come to brief Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim and the Tanzanian government on the RPF's decision.

The ceasefire declaration signed by RPF Chairman Alexis Kanyarengwe comes into force at midnight (2100 GMT) on Monday, but the rebels have vowed to resume fighting if the government fails to meet its conditions, including an end to mass killings.

Human rights workers estimate 100,000 people have been butchered and two million made homeless since violence erupted when president Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in a rocket attack on his plane on April 6.

Rudasingwa condemned the international community for "wanting a ceasefire but refusing to address the issue of who is responsible for the massacres."

"The world has been silent in the face of evil," he added.

Most of the victims of violence have been members of the small Tutsi clan associated with the rebels, and opposition party supporters killed by Habyarimana's presidential guard and hardline Hutus, the U.N. and aid workers say.

The rebels have repeatedly said they do not recognise the civilian interim government declared after Habyarimana's death - which it accuses of masterminding the killings - but will talk to the military.

"We will not talk to the interim government but we can talk to the military even if their hands are tainted with blood...", Rudasingwa said.

Salim welcomed news of the ceasefire, adding : "Much will depend on what happens on the ground."

U.N. special envoy to Rwanda Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh complained the rebels had not communicated the ceasefire declaration officially to the world body and when asked what he thought of it said : "As of now, no comment."

If it is implemented, the ceasefire could save the U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) which was cut from 2,500 to 270 personnel in a Security

Council resolution on Thursday.

Booh-Booh said earlier on Saturday 1,000 U.N. peacekeepers were standing by in Nairobi and could be redeployed in Rwanda if there was an ending of hostilities.

Western diplomats also appeared confused, but one said : "It takes two to tango, and we are still waiting for the government side to arrive."

Tanzanian government officials said they would make another attempt to get the rebels to attend talks – as long as the government delegation turned up on Sunday.

The rebels' ceasefire terms include a demand for killings to stop in government areas within 96 hours of it coming into effect, the establishment of a tribunal to investigate and bring the killers to justice, delivery of humanitarian aid and international monitoring of the arrangement.

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