

Rwanda's warring factions a continent apart

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ARUSHA, Tanzania, April 25 (Reuter) - Rwanda's warring parties sat a continent apart on Monday after mediators failed to get them together on neutral ground and try to end the butchery which claimed its latest victims in a Rwanda hospital.

International peace brokers said they had not yet given up trying to get Rwanda's government and rebel leaders to mutually agree a ceasefire a day after the collapse of planned talks.

"We are determined to pursue these consultations in order to obtain a ceasefire," Organisation of African Unity Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim said in Tanzania's northern town Arusha where talks failed to start on Sunday.

The latest massacre happened near Rwanda's border with Burundi where witnesses said troops and gunmen killed up to 150 patients, as well as nurses and drivers, at a hospital because they were members of the minority Tutsi tribe.

On Sunday, journalists in rebel-controlled territory just south of the Rwandan capital Kigali came across a pile of 100 rotting corpses in Nyanza district and more bodies spilling out of mud huts.

Survivors said most of the dead were Tutsis, killed by gunmen who threw grenades into a crowd rounded up by troops as they tried to reach the U.N.-protected stadium in Kigali.

The tribal slaughter, which human rights groups estimate has claimed 100,000 victims since the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana's in a rocket attack on his plane on April 6, continued unabated.

Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira was also killed in the same rocket attack but Burundi's Tutsi and Hutu tribes have so far held their rivalry in check.

Burundi's army said on Monday a military coup staged by units of the Tutsi-dominated army failed after moderate units failed to take part, fearful of a Hutu-Tutsi tribal bloodbath like the one waging in Rwanda.

Salim and other African officials were still waiting for Rwanda's government delegates, who 48 hours after talks were supposed to start strayed to Gbadolite in Zaire, where they signed a ceasefire agreement brokered by President Mobutu Sese Seko due to come into effect Sunday noon. The rebels did not turn up for the signing.

Salim said he and Tanzanian Prime Minister John Malecela had "extensive" talks with rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) Secretary-General Theogene

Rudasingwa on details of a unilateral ceasefire due to come into effect on Monday night.

U.N. Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Peter Hansen, who travelled to Arusha after a brief visit to Kigali, said a ceasefire would allow a massive humanitarian operation to begin for Rwanda.

“Hopefully Kigali airport can be a staging base for supplies to the capital, with cross border operations in the north and south to reach all those in need,” he told Reuters.

Rudasingwa left Arusha after delivering news of the ceasefire, saying the RPF would go back to fighting if government forces failed to stop mass killings of civilians within 96 hours. He refused to take part in peace talks with his enemies.

“If the killings do not end, the military option remains,” Rudasingwa said.

The government response could not be known as all normal telephone lines to the central African nation are cut and all but 270 U.N. observers and soldiers are left in Kigali.

The RPF has refused to recognise the self-declared interim government, set up in the aftermath of Habyarimana’s death and now based in the regional town of Gityrama.

The RPF denies being behind the killing of Habyarimana – Belgium has accused hardline Hutus of masterminding it as part of an ethnic doomsday plan – and says it went on the offensive to stop the mass killings and restore order.

“The people in mass graves, the children on spears are our mothers, our own children,” said Rudasingwa.

“We will not revenge, but apportioning blame is part and parcel of conflict resolution. Punishment is part of national reconciliation.”

A lone voice in the international community, Salim said he supported the RPF’s demand for the creation of an international tribunal to investigate Habyarimana’s death and the genocide which followed it, and to bring those responsible to justice.

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