

Hutu Refugees Loot Food Lorries After Press Keeps Them Waiting.

Tom Walker

The Times, 4 mai 1994

From Tom Walker in Ngara, Tanzania.

Red Cross food lorries were looted by refugees from Rwanda at Tanzania's Benake camp, crowded with a quarter of a million Hutus, after they grew tired of being told to wait in orderly lines for hours while being photographed by the world's press.

Aid workers reacted angrily yesterday to the sight of camera teams closing in on a semi-conscious woman who was slumped at the front of one of the food queues, but with ten planes crowded with journalists having arrived at the tiny nearby Ngara airstrip by midday, there was little to stop the media intrusion.

To increase security at the camp, especially during food distribution, the Tanzanian authorities began setting up tents for hundreds of police. Meanwhile, aid agencies moved closer to establishing reliable supply lines to Benake and the World Food Programme promised that stocks of maize, beans and oil would get to Benake before it is too late.

As a trickle of new arrivals filed in clutching all they had, the tensions between aid workers and journalists grew with the rains closing in from the east threatening to hamper work on

life-saving water systems and field hospitals.

Engineers from Medecins sans Frontieres were working around the clock on a pipeline to the camp in an attempt to stop refugees tramping through the quagmire to get at Benake's only source of water, a murky lake beneath the sprawling camp. Yesterday women and children laden with pots, buckets and jerrycans slipped and fell trying to climb the mud slopes back to the camp. Medecins sans Frontieres estimates that the refugees will need up to half a million gallons of water a day. Red Cross workers set up an emergency orphanage for the scores of children who have arrived with no families. At the airstrip, Mauro Romagnoli, managing director of Cogefar, an Italian engineering company helping the aid effort, watched in dismay as a huge CNN charter plane shuddered across the mud and dust strip. "This cannot go on," he said. "With the termites, this airstrip will look like a gruyere cheese soon."

Tanzania's troubled relationship with Uganda, its neighbour, threatened yesterday to sink hopes of an African-brokered settlement at a high-level meeting in Arusha to try to end the Rwanda genocide.

President Museveni of Uganda clearly tempted to support the American initiative for an intervention force, openly supports the Rwanda Patriotic Front because it helped to bring him to power in 1986. Tanzania, although is unwilling to step out of line with a resurgent Uganda.