

Kigali Gunmen Kill Injured In Red Cross Van.

Catherine Bond

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From Catherine Bond in Kigali.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) suspended the collecting of wounded in Kigali, the Rwandan capital, yesterday shortly after six injured civilians were shot dead in the back of a vehicle belonging to the National Rwandan Red Cross.

The victims shot dead in the van were said to have been killed by government soldiers or militiamen manning one of the numerous checkpoints in the city.

Earlier, Philippe Gaillard, the ICRC's delegate in Rwanda, visited a suburb, Nyamirambo, in the south of the city. "It was carnage. There were hundreds of dead, all civilians, mostly men," M Gaillard said, visibly shaken.

The majority of the killings are carried out by militias, trained at the instigation of Juvenal Habyarimana, the Rwandan President, who was killed when his aircraft was shot down last week. The militiamen belonged to two political parties which are opposed to sharing power with rebels from Rwanda's minority Tutsi tribe, who now control northeastern areas of the city. The rebels and militiamen continued fighting yesterday in spite of attempts by the United Nations to organise negotiations between the rebels and the government troops.

Increasingly in the past two days,

the militiamen have appeared on the streets armed with guns and stick grenades given to them by the remnants of a government led by extremists from the majority Hutu tribe.

Some streets in an area lying between the city centre and the international airport are covered with corpses. On the other side of the front line, eyewitnesses said that the rebels shot dead and then cut up at least two men in civilian clothes near the rebel headquarters yesterday. A United Nations officer said that the rebels had put five people in a house and slaughtered them. There is a 2,000-strong UN force in the country, but it has a humanitarian rather than peacekeeping mandate. The authority of the force will be further undermined by the imminent withdrawal of well-equipped Belgian troops.

Yesterday General Romeo Dallaire, the Canadian head of the UN forces in Rwanda, spoke of the trauma that military observers experienced after seeing the killings and the disregard of the blue beret, the UN's insignia of neutrality. "You want to be there, you want to assist, you want to help by the presence of your blue beret ... and there is no respect," he said. "It is a terrible experience."

General Dallaire said the rebels had stepped up their bombardment of the

northern garrison town of Byumba, about 45 miles north of Kigali. He said about 20,000 government troops were still in their defensive positions in and to the north of the capital.

UN-brokered talks between the two sides failed to take place yesterday, but General Dallaire said that the UN was still trying to act as a channel and could play a useful role.