

Mini-summit on Burundi and Rwanda opens in Tanzanian capital

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DAR ES SALAAM, April 6 (AFP) - A mini-summit of east and central African leaders opened here on Wednesday to discuss ethnic troubles in war-torn Burundi and Rwanda, chaired by Tanzanian President Ali Hassan Mwinyi.

The meeting was attended by, among others, Presidents Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi, Kenyan Vice-President George Saitoti and Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim.

Presidents Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and Frederick Chiluba of Zambia were expected to attend but failed to arrive, and no reasons were given for their absence.

Mwinyi expressed frustration and disappointment over failure to restore peace and bring democracy to Rwanda and Burundi, two tiny central African nations that have known no peace since independence more than 30 years ago due to ethnic conflicts between majority Hutus and minority Tutsis.

Mwinyi pointed out that when Tanzania brokered a peace accord between the Rwandan government and Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels last year, he had hoped that the two-year civil war would come to an end and peace be restored.

"In retrospect, everything seems to have gone to waste, and this frustration is not mine alone, it is also the frustration of all the neighbouring countries, the OAU, and the United Nations", Mwinyi said.

Mwinyi, who convened the mini-summit to discuss the situation in the two countries - the Rwandan peace accord impasse and recent massacres of civilians in Burundi - pointed out that out of the three transitional institutions provided for in the Arusha accords, only the presidency was in place.

"The tragedy as far as I am concerned is that the so-called stumbling blocks to the implementation of the peace process, such as the allocation of seats in parliament and cabinet posts are by all accounts matters not worth shedding a single drop of blood for", Mwinyi said.

On Burundi, Mwinyi said it was sad to see that the joy of a new era of peace, stability and co-operation in the brought about in the region by last July's democratic elections was wiped out by the military establishment's decision last October to put their "parochial interests above the wishes of the Burundians".

The Tutsi-dominated army staged a failed coup on October 21. The first elected president from the Hutu majority, Melchior Ndadaye, was murdered along with several of his key aides, and Burundi plunged into a bloody ethnic war which left hundreds of thousands of people dead and forced more than 700,000 others to flee into neighbouring Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire.

“What Burundians got through the ballot box was taken away by the gun, and the situation as we all know, is very grave and, as neighbours, we cannot keep quiet,” Mwinyi said.

In their remarks, Habyarimana and Ntaryamira pledged to make all efforts to restore peace in their two countries.

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