

Mortar Bombs Kill 14 in Church Haven for Kigali Refugees

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By Catherine Bond at Rusumo on the Rwanda-Tanzania Border and Tom Walker at Ngara, Northwest Tanzania.

FOURTEEN Rwandans were killed and 150 wounded by mortar fire in a church compound in the capital, Kigali, where they had taken refuge from fighting, aid workers said yesterday.

At least two mortar bombs exploded near the Holy Family church, Moctar Gueye, of the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (Unamir), reported. Kigali, where government forces are battling advancing rebels of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), suffered "one of the heaviest days of shelling we have seen", Patrick Gosser, of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), confirmed. "Mortars did not hit the church itself. They hit the surroundings and people were hurt in a market area," Mr Gosser said. Sixty of the wounded were

transported to the ICRC's makeshift hospital, set up to cope with horrific casualties in recent weeks, and others were taken to Kigali's central hospital.

The blanched corpses of massacre victims are choking the rocky crevices that lie below the Rusumo bridge marking Rwanda's border with Tanzania. Bodies of adults and infants float at the water's edge. Soldiers from the rebel army looked down from the bridge in horror. No strangers to death or brutality, the killings in which 200,000 Rwandans are estimated to have died have left them angered and anguished.

"People will think we are animals," Major Geoffrey Byegeka, of the rebel army, said. "This has given Rwanda a bad name. For years I travelled on a Ugandan passport and people thought I was an animal. Now I am Rwandan and it will be the same." The rebel radio station

reaffirmed that the RPF had “no intention to and will never negotiate any ceasefire with the illegitimate and self-imposed government in Rwanda”. But the rebels deny they have closed the border with Tanzania, trapping would-be refugees.

The United Nations says about 2,000 mainly Tutsi civilians are clustered around Holy Family where they have sought refuge from marauding pro-government Hutu militias since chaos erupted after President Habyarimana’s death in a rocket attack on his plane on April 6. “They are running from certain death,” Mr Gueye said.

Last night the International Red Cross issued a warning that refugee numbers at the largest camp in the Ngara region of northwest Tanzania could double if Hutus, stranded in Rwanda, made the perilous journey across the Akagera river. The Red Cross launched an appeal for money, medicines and materials to help the quarter of a million Rwandans living precariously in the Benako camp, set amid the rolling countryside east of Rusumo Falls. The refugees are living in a scrub landscape with no shelter, little water and food sufficient for one week only.

Yesterday a pathetic straggle of homeless Hutus still lined the picturesque route through banana plantations from the camp to Rusumo Falls. Families staggered along car-

rying all they owned, with mattresses piled high on bicycles and livestock, ranging from pigs to goats, dragging along behind.

Empty canoes lined the banks of the Akagera river, suggesting that many Hutus, trying to flee the country, might attempt the dangerous journey overnight. Pangas, confiscated by Tanzanian soldiers, lay in the grass. The Ngara authorities have also claimed to have found grenades and rifles being smuggled into Benako.

The rebel army, which invaded Rwanda in October 1990, comprises 11,000 troops, many of whom were brought up as refugees in Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania and Zaire, after their parents fled ethnic killings from 1959 to 1962 in which Rwanda’s Hutu majority targeted the Tutsi minority. The rebel army reached the border post on Friday, beating Rwandan government troops and militias into retreat. A heap of machetes and arrows testifies to the hasty departure of thousands of militiamen who fled into Tanzania.

The rebels, instead of an all-out assault to take the capital, say they are pursuing government troops west towards a swampy area south of Kigali, but the pace of their advance is being held up by new massacres ahead of them. Injured survivors are brought back to a hospital at Gahini, 70 miles east of Kigali, supplied

by a French aid agency, Medecins du Monde.

They have also rescued Belgian, Swiss and Mexican citizens who had not wanted to be evacuated by the UN but were threatened by militias. Charlotte Sauteauz, 55, a Swiss woman running an orphanage, said the rebels had led her to safety on Sunday after entering her home area at dawn. Among the newly orphaned Tutsi children in her care is a four-month-old baby. "I never thought this kind of thing could happen in real life, I thought it only happened in nightmares," she said. By comparison with 1959, the present killings have been merciless. "According to the stories, in 1959 those who fled to

a church were assured of safety. This time they have made sure that nobody survives," Tony Kabano, a rebel lieutenant, said.

Because churches were hiding places, they became targets. At Rukara, about 70 miles east of Kigali, the decomposing bodies of 200 men, women and children, litter the grounds of a church run by a Spanish priest who had tried in vain to save them. The rebel force secured the area after the massacre.

In Washington, the White House said that it was sending two envoys to Uganda, Burundi and Tanzania in an effort to get talks started to end the bitter fighting.