

With Nobody Left to Kill, the Militias are Bored

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AN eight-year-old girl lay catatonic on the floor of a tent nursing a wound in her back. She had been gang-raped by militiamen in Rwanda's capital, Kigali, and had not uttered a word since she was taken to the hospital three weeks ago. But at least she was not dead. According to the Rwandan government, which may have connived in the genocide of the Tutsi, 60,000 other people have been buried in mass graves.

That is almost three in five of the estimated 350,000 people who used to live in a city which is at war with the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front, and with itself.

Aid workers agree that a nationwide death toll of 500,000 from the massacres of the government's political opponents and members of the Tutsi tribe is probably an underestimate it could be as many as a million.

The murder rate of government troops and the militias some 12,000

a day beggars the imagination. Until one comes face to face with the murderers. Then, heavily armed gendarmes shake like men on the way to the gallows.

Yesterday the tension was obvious as a lieutenant with an AK47 guided journalists into Kigali. A score of wide-eyed youths, armed with blood-stained clubs, hammers, machetes, grenades and rifles, took a close look at his pass. "Belge? Belge?," their leader screamed Belgians are unpopular in Rwanda. "Non, Anglais," he replied. The routine was repeated with increasing hysteria during the drive to the capital, which is being pounded by rebel artillery as the Patriotic Front seeks to seize the international airport and contain the government's forces, while exercising a flanking manoeuvre to cut off its access to the south.

Heavy shelling rocked the city and the clatter of machineguns formed

an background which residents ignored. Their main fear remains the militia, which were now based in Gitarama, 30 miles south of the capital and beyond the control of the government, according to the Defence Minister Augustin Biziman. With nobody left to kill, the militias are bored, making life for the 15 workers of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Medecins Sans Frontieres a 24-hour trauma.

Few bodies from the slaughter are

left on Kigali's streets, but the air stinks of death. Red Cross workers who have lived through the holocaust are barely able to talk.

Patrick Gasser, deputy head of the beleaguered Red Cross delegation, said : "We have had no piped water for four days, and there is no way that these people can get food. Sooner or later they will have to emerge from the shadows, and then the killing will start again. They might get 250 yards. But I doubt it."