

Opposition holds first mass demonstration in Rwanda

AFP, November 17, 1991

KIGALI, Nov 17 (AFP) - Some 25,000 people staged an impressive "march for democracy" in Rwanda here Sunday at the call of three opposition parties.

The march called by the Republican Democratic Movement, the Liberal Party and the Social Democrat Party was the first-ever opposition demonstration in Rwanda.

The newly-registered Rwandan Socialist Party also joined in the demonstration.

The 10-kilometre (six-mile) march across Kigali went ahead peacefully despite fears of violence.

"Rumours that the security forces were going to open fire on the crowd discouraged some of our supporters from attending," said an official of the Republican Democratic Movement, which mobilised the most people.

The Rwandan capital has a population of about 300,000.

Demonstrators bore placards hostile to the ruling and formerly sole party, the Rwandan Movement for National Development, and called for the holding of a national conference.

The main purpose of the march was to protest against monopolisation of the broadcast media by the party, against use of state vehicles for ruling party rallies and against intimidation of opposition sympathisers.

Analysts saw the demonstration as also aimed at showing the strength of the opposition ahead of President Juvenal Habyarimana's attendance at the annual Franco-African summit which opens in Paris on Tuesday.

mgu/ma/hn AFP AFP SEQN-0178