

RPF's PM-designate returns to Rwanda

Robert Block

The Independent, July 15, 1994

ROBERT BLOCK in Kigali

THE man designated by the rebel Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) to be the next prime minister of Rwanda returned home yesterday after months of exile. But it was a homecoming set against the background of a continuing rebel offensive in the north-western corner of the country that was driving hundreds of thousands of frightened Hutu civilians across the Zairean frontier, overwhelming international relief organisations and threatening a massive humanitarian disaster.

Faustin Twagiramungu, a Hutu moderate named by the mainly Tutsi RPF to head a national unity government, said upon his arrival on a UN transport plane at Kigali airport that his priority was to reassure those fleeing the rebel advance.

'We can only hope the success of the RPF will help Rwanda and that the Rwandan people will be able to forget their miseries,' he said.

But as of yesterday, it appeared

that the RPF was the cause of misery for as many as 500,000 Hutus fleeing the rebel drive on Gisenyi, the seat of the rump Hutu extremist government and its last stronghold in the country.

RPF sources said its forces had taken the garrison town of Ruhengeri and were moving towards Gisenyi, 15 miles west. The sources claim the RPF is now 10 miles from Gisenyi and there were reports that the outskirts were in range of rebel guns. Hutu government officials in Gisenyi said the Rwandan army had no hope of winning the battle. A French soldier in Goma, Zaire, said the RPF appeared determined to take Gisenyi to drive out the remnants of the government 'and by implication they do not care what this causes to thousands of people'.

The stream of Hutu civilians, described by some aid agencies as a 'human tidal wave', is being spurred by fear of RPF retribution for the thousands of people killed by extremist Hutu militias after the 6 April death

of Rwanda's president, Juvenal Habyarimana, in a suspicious plane crash. If the offensive continues, aid agencies warn that eastern Zaire will be swamped with as many as 1 million refugees in days.

Some officials of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) estimated that refugees were crossing into Zaire at the rate of 10,000 people an hour. 'The situation is bad. It is a humanitarian catastrophe,' said Johann Grombach, an ICRC delegate in Goma.

The RPF has promised to call a ceasefire once Mr Twagiramungu names a cabinet and the leaders of the extremist Hutu government are apprehended for war crimes. He is expected to name a government by tomorrow.

'I have come here to assume my

responsibility. It is my duty to consult partners to set up a transitional broad-based government,' said the Prime Minister-designate.

The UN envoy, Shahayar Kahn, said that Mr Twagiramungu and he agreed that the first thing to do was to establish a ceasefire. 'Things are not good. But the situation is by no means desperate. The first thing that needs to be done is to give the people fleeing reassurance, to let them know . . . they are not going to be persecuted.'

NEW YORK - The UN Security Council, faced with dire warnings from France of another humanitarian catastrophe, yesterday demanded an immediate ceasefire in Rwanda and called on the international community to supply relief for refugees fleeing rebel troops, Reuter reports.