

U.N. in Rwanda Says It Is Powerless to Halt the Violence

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The New York Times, April 15, 1994

As battling armies pounded the capital with mortar fire today, the United Nations command here said that it could do little to stop the fighting or prevent the massacre of civilians and that an attempt to hold peace talks had failed.

Marauding groups of looters and soldiers remained in control of the otherwise deserted streets, as reports of mass killings filtered out to the thousands of Rwandans still stranded in churches, schools and stadiums with no armed protection. In the main hotels, which were filled with refugees, the mood was one of doom.

The fighting was so intense at times that Belgian troops stationed at the airport were unable to reach a group of more than a dozen Western journalists stranded in a hotel at the center of the city.

Airport Hit by Mortar Shells

With the streets too treacherous to negotiate, the hotel appeared to be sealed off from even well-armed rescuers. But this evening, a convoy of abandoned cars assembled by the journalists and escorted by an armored Uni-

ted Nations military vehicle, made its way through roadblocks to the airport. The convoy was not fired upon, but the airport was hit with at least 10 mortar rounds. The journalists flew out to the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, on a C-130 transport with about 40 Rwandan refugees. Five journalists remained in Kigali but moved, with the help of the United Nations, to a hotel away from the heaviest fighting.

With the city descending further into chaos, the role of the 2,000 United Nations troops in Rwanda has become increasingly difficult. The soldiers, most of them in Kigali, have witnessed massacres that they were unable to prevent because the United Nations contingent was deployed under a mandate that restricts it to monitoring a since-broken peace agreement between the Rwandan rebels and the Government.

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Their movements are also limited within Kigali, and their sole mission since fighting broke out last Wednesday has been to try to broker cease-fires and bring the warring factions to-

gether. Renewed fighting prevented the United Nations from convening talks between representatives of the Government and the rebels today.

“We have been sitting now eight or nine days in our trenches” said the United Nations commander, Gen. Romeo Dallaire of Canada. “The question is how long do you sit there or attempt to get it settled? This is not a peace enforcing mission. They haven’t stopped firing so I’d say I’m not yet effective. If we don’t see any light at the end of the tunnel, if we see another three weeks of being cooped up watching them pound each other then we have to seriously assess the risk of keeping these soldiers here.”

Kigali erupted in ethnic and political violence on April 6 when President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was killed in a suspicious plane explosion. His death set off a centuries-old tribal hatred between the minority Tutsi ethnic group and the majority Hutus. Since then, tens of thousands of Rwandans have been killed, most of them in massacres.

According to the United Nations, 17,600 people have fled Rwanda since fighting began. These include 8,000 Burundi refugees who returned to Burundi from Rwanda and 8,000 Rwandans who have sought sanctuary in Zaire. The United Nations said it had no figures on the number of displaced people.

All Americans and Europeans were evacuated from this former Belgian colony, and the last Western troops, from France and Rwanda’s former colonial master, Belgium, were expected to leave their airport bunkers today or Friday. Relief officials and Rwandans expect the fighting to worsen after the troops leave.

After an overnight lull, fighting resumed at dawn today. Heavy mortars and machine-gun fire shook the center of the city for most of the day. Increasingly, it appeared that the Rwandan Army was ceding control of the streets to bands of drunken men armed with machetes, spears, truncheons and automatic weapons that manned checkpoints throughout the city. The International Committee of the Red Cross temporarily suspended relief operations today when gunmen stopped one of its trucks carrying six wounded Rwandans, pulled the Rwandans out and killed them. Earlier, Red Cross officials came across 15 bodies hacked to death in front of a religious school.

’Machete Massacres’

“It is machete massacres,” said Philippe Gaillard, the chief Red Cross representative here. “More and more the civilian population armed with machetes is ruling the streets. The army cannot control them.”

“You want to hold back those people when you are witnessing it,” he said, “but you have your blue beret and there’s no respect for it.”

In Kigali, scores of Rwandans have taken refuge at the Hotel Mille Collines. There is an uneasy, nervous coexistence there between the families of the Rwandan military and some middle-class Tutsis who were unable to leave the city.

Both are convinced they will be massacred. They congregate in the dark hallways, whispering for hours, virtual prisoners. As United Nations soldiers came to take the foreign journalists to the airport, dozens of the

Rwandans crowded around and begged to be evacuated, fearing that the departure of Westerners would mean sure death for them. Their pleas were rejected by the troops. As the convoy left, many gathered silently in the driveway and stared.

On the road to the airport, one

neighborhood had been emptied by fighting, the houses burned and shops ransacked. In one place corpses were still piled up. Towering over the deserted shacks, a poster for Guinness stout – two hands clinking beer mugs – seemed grossly out of place. “The Power of Love,” it declared.