

UN Drags Heels on Rwanda Probe

Scott Peterson

Christian Science Monitor, October 7, 1994

Inadequate resources dog investigation, and agencies may be papering over new abuses

KIGALI, RWANDA — CONFUSION, delay, and an apparent lack of political will on the part of the United Nations over investigating war crimes have led many Rwandans and some UN officials to worry that Rwanda's genocide - the fastest mass slaughter of humans recorded this century - is being forgotten.

Though much of Rwanda is now quiet, the calm masks a ready violence. A competent tribunal could help uproot the deeply ingrained ethnic mistrust in this country and send the message to Africa and the world that human rights abuses will be punished.

"If the in-depth investigation and monitoring began now, we could ... break the cycle of impunity," says one UN official. "It would be the beginning of the end of the culture of easy mass killing." A UN Committee of Experts called on Sept. 30 for the Yugoslav war-crimes tribunal to include Rwanda.

But for the families of those who were killed - estimated to be at least 500,000 - and for the new government, the wheels of international justice appear to move far too slowly. The government is arresting more and more suspected killers even though it does not yet have the means to sustain them

in prison or try them in Rwanda's decimated courts.

UN and relief officials say the arrests blur the line between repression and justice. Rwandan lawyers detailing atrocities worry that unconfirmed reports of revenge killings and disappearances at the hands of the new government, and a preoccupation with national reconciliation, overshadow the fundamental crime.

Scant resources

Three months after relative peace was restored, just 27 UN human rights monitors are now in Rwanda - out of 147 requested; they arrived only in the past two weeks. Many are inexperienced.

The first head of the UN investigating team, Irish lawyer Karen Kenny, resigned on Sept. 10, frustrated over a lack of support from Geneva and New York. Though overwhelmed with information on the genocide and the current abuses by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the Tutsi-dominated rebel movement that has formed the new government, the four-member human rights team found itself wasting time begging other agencies for vehicles.

"It was so obvious the lack of resources, it got to be a joke," says a UN official, requesting anonymity. "Never

before has there been a genocide where the victims have been victorious. The killing was so obviously organized, ... so easy, so open. We have never seen the quantity or quality of information as there is here.”

A request is still unfulfilled for a group of specialist investigative experts to analyze forensic, ballistic, and military evidence. Language experts are needed to analyze local radio broadcasts that incited Hutus to “fill the half-empty graves” with dead Tutsis, but Ms. Kenny could even not get funding for 200 blank cassette tapes to record the broadcasts.

Oxfam and Save the Children Fund-UK on Tuesday deplored the “lamentably slow” UN response, and gave \$150,000 to ease the “funding crisis” of the UN human rights monitors.

The root of the problem in Rwanda, UN sources here say, is a conflict between the heads of the UN Center for Human Rights in Geneva and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in New York. Both agencies have been given similar mandates : to collect evidence of genocide for use in establishing a tribunal ; and to monitor human rights abuses.

UN sources close to the investigation also say that the UN military operation in Rwanda is too close to the RPF government to want an inspection of current abuses, fearing that the incidents could prove “too systematic.”

And some countries, notably France, which armed and trained the Hutu Army and supported the former genocidal Hutu government, have put pressure on the UN to appoint incompetent jurists, UN sources say.

The number of prisoners held by the RPF government has jumped in the past month from 2,000 to 6,000 ac-

ording to Majorlaine Martin, the deputy head of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Kigali.

The UNHCR has accused the RPF of “systematic” abductions and revenge killings of Hutus in southeast Rwanda. But the allegations, contained in a series of notes said to estimate that 30,000 Hutus have been killed, have caused such a stir inside the UN that Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali told the UNHCR not to discuss them further.

RPF officials suspect that the UNHCR accusations - which have not been substantiated by any other UN or relief agency - are meant to push them into offering a blanket amnesty for the killers.

“We must have trials soon or people will make their own justice,” says RPF Director of Information Maj. Wilson Rutayisire. “Justice delayed is justice denied.” Some 70 RPF soldiers are being held by the government for committing revenge attacks, and two have been executed.

Justice in Rwanda will only come with pressure - and help - from the international community. “A cycle of violence, fear, and impunity is entrenched : There is now an opportunity to break that cycle and to put principles of justice at the base of the new Rwanda,” states the first lengthy report on the genocide, published Sept. 29 by London-based group Africa Rights. “The consequences of failure are horrific to contemplate.”

A sanctuary destroyed

Filling the gap before UN monitors took to the fields, UN troops have made rudimentary inspections of a few massacre sites.

When they visited the hidden chapel at Ntarama, in a wood just 15 miles south of Kigali, the evidence was grim. Packed between the simple bench pews lie the remains of 400 decaying bodies.

From the church door children inspect the bodies. Their eyes gather all the details : A five-foot-long stave is dark with blood ; clubs of all shapes lie among the human wreckage ; a thick

tin pot, evidently held up as a shield, is bent and riven through.

“The fact that the world can watch 500,000 people die is a failure for us,” says a UN official. “What will be the result of genocide if no action is taken ? What credibility will we have ? In Rwanda we are in danger of losing our souls.”