

Call is issued for investigation of extermination of Hutus in Zaire

by Linda de Hoyos

United Nations human rights investigator Roberto Garreton announced from Geneva on April 2, upon his return from a three-day tour of eastern Zaire, that the United Nations must carry out a full probe into the campaign to eliminate the 1 million Rwandan Hutu refugees that had been sheltered in eastern Zaire. Up to the period of the Ugandan and Rwandan invasion of eastern Zaire at the end of October 1996, there had been 1.2 million Rwandan Hutu refugees in the area, nominally under the protection of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR).

Garreton told the press in Geneva, "There were massacres by rebels [forces operating under the cover of Laurent Kabila]. That's for sure. There's an enormous list of allegations of massacres, but it is impossible to give numbers." Garreton also pointed to Ugandan and Rwandan troops' involvement in the area: "I can't say that the Rwandan and Ugandan armies are there with their generals and colonels. But the local people view the rebel forces as an occupation army. It is clear that these rebels are not Zaireans."

Garreton's charge of mass murder taking place in eastern Zaire is confirmation of charges put forward in an eyewitness account by a Belgian living in eastern Zaire, which was submitted to the United Nations and also publicized by the Paris daily *Le Monde* on Feb. 26. The charges of the Belgian eyewitness are further confirmed by two reports by the British intelligence outlet Amnesty International, "Zaire: Hidden from Scrutiny: Human Rights Abuses in Eastern Zaire," issued in December 1996; and "Rwanda—Human Rights Overlooked in Mass Repatriation," issued in January 1997.

The Amnesty reports and the Belgian account have been completely blacked out of the United States media.

The combined reports confirm the warnings issued by American statesman Lyndon LaRouche in November 1996, that unless the United States established a bilateral military deployment with the Zairean government to protect the refugees against the Rwandan-Ugandan invasion, it would mean the death of hundreds of thousands of defenseless people, 70% of whom are women and children.

Extermination campaign

The plan for the forced repatriation and "disappearance" of more than 1 million Rwandan Hutu refugees was apparent by September 1996—one month before the Rwandan-Ugan-

dan invasion of eastern Zaire. At that point, the United Nations Security Council voted to lift the arms embargo against Rwanda, while maintaining that against any Rwandans living outside Rwanda, giving the green light for the invasion one month later. Simultaneously, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees began clamoring to rescind the designation of "refugees" in respect to the Rwandan refugees, claiming that they were guaranteed a safe return to Rwanda. This UNHCR claim was highly publicized, thus preparing the international community's blanket of silence when the refugee camps were militarily bombarded by the Rwandan and Ugandan forces operating under the political cover of Zairean mercenary Laurent Kabila.

As the Amnesty International report on Rwanda states: "The return of an estimated 500,000 Rwandese refugees from Zaire [in November] in just a few days was not voluntary. It was a question of survival. Refugees who had just crossed over the border into Gisenyi, northwestern Rwanda, in mid-November 1996 told AI that their camps had been attacked by armed groups. . . . Many refugees and local Zaireans died in the fighting, some caught in crossfire, others deliberately targeted. . . . One refugee from Mugunga camp [cited in the Brussels report] said he had seen around 50 bodies of men, women, and children, most of them with gunshot wounds. Other refugees, as well as displaced Zaireans, died of hunger, exhaustion and disease. Whatever the causes of death, those who attacked the camps and took advantage of their military clashes to kill and disperse refugees were responsible for significant loss of life and for terrorizing hundreds of thousands of refugees."

'No one could escape'

Even beyond the military bombardment of the camps, in violation of international law, the Amnesty report relates in detail one premeditated massacre of the inhabitants of a camp by Rwandan forces. The eyewitness account came from one young man, Tharcisse Barutwanayao, who had fled a camp in Uvira that was attacked, making his way to Bukavu, and then to Chimanga. He testified:

"At 5 p.m., the Banyamulenge entered the camp. They told us to gather in a particular place in the camp for a meeting, during which they would tell us how we could return. In total there were 700 people in the camp. Around 100 agreed to go

to the meeting place. We did not, as we were afraid of being killed. Then they surrounded the camp so that no one could escape. At 5:45 p.m., they shelled the area where they had told people to gather. They also shot at those people with their guns. Meanwhile, the ones who had surrounded the camp also opened fire on those of us who had not gone to the meeting place. Many died. Next to my tent there were around 20 dead, and two more from among our little group. Of the 700 people who had been in the camp, fewer than 100 arrived at the transit camp.”

This is but one of “enormous list of allegations of massacres” cited by Garreton, and detailed in the Belgian and Amnesty accounts.

The picture that thus emerges is that approximately 500,000 refugees returned to Rwanda in November 1996, under threat of death by the Ugandan and Rwandan Tutsi forces comprising the “rebel forces.” As Garreton indicated, it is impossible to tell how many refugees were actually killed in this first onslaught.

The multilateral UN force, comprised of U.S., Canadian, and other forces, which had been prepared to go into Zaire to assist the refugees, who had taken flight, was hastily called off—despite the fact that at least 600,000 refugees remained in Zaire without any aid whatsoever. The motivation for this reversal, as put forward by Roger Winter, of the U.S. Committee for Refugees, was the lie that there are no refugees remaining in Zaire, and as Winter put it: “Those who have gone further west are either family [of the Hutu militias] or other very bad people. If they are in a bad position, so be it.”

Death marches

In Rwanda itself, there was no relief or security, according to the Amnesty report. The very return took on the character of a death march—a tried and true method of eliminating large numbers of persons rapidly. Amnesty reports, “Humanitarian NGOs [non-governmental organizations] were told that aid could be distributed only after the returnees had formally registered with local authorities in their home areas, a process which would take at least several days. . . . Many of the refugees returning to Rwanda were already in poor physical condition after walking for weeks in Zaire to escape the fighting. Once they crossed the border, they were not allowed to rest. The Rwandese authorities made them carry on walking.” Since NGOs and other assistance organizations were not permitted to follow the refugees past the transit zones, there is no telling how many actually lived to reach their former homes.

Secondly, Amnesty reports: “There was no attempt to register the hundreds of thousands of refugees as they crossed the border into Rwanda. . . . The absence of registration until returnees reach their homes means that there is scope for ‘disappearances.’ ”

Those refugees remaining in Zaire have been forced into a succession of similar death marches, as they flee the invading forces. The greatest concentration of refugees was at Tingi-Tingi camp, where 200,000 huddled without adequate aid in

conditions described as “appalling” and with hundreds dying daily. This group was forced to move west, out of Kabila’s grip, but many have been surrounded. Now, it appears that Kabila is marching them from one site to another. As described by one outlet: “Emaciated refugees, some almost skeletal, were attempting to walk toward aid at Kisangani, but those too weak to start the trek lay dead and dying within the abandoned Ubilo camp. . . . The refugees huddling along a railway line are dying of malaria, dysentery, fatigue and malnutrition, a Zairean Red Cross nurse said. In addition, refugees were uprooted from another camp at Lula and forced to move south, but their condition is so weak that many are simply dying along the roadside.”

According to many accounts, the forests of eastern Zaire are likewise littered with the dead bodies of exhausted, starved, and diseased refugees.

UNHCR must be called to account

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, in complete violation of its mandate and charter, has acted to cover for *and supervise* the elimination of Hutu refugees, and should become an immediate object of investigation by the United Nations secretary general.

Amnesty wrote in its January report on Rwanda:

“AI has serious concerns about the role played by the international community in particular UNHCR, in condoning the massive refoulement [forcing back] of refugees to Rwanda by neighboring countries. . . . UNHCR’s statute entrusts it with the role of protecting refugees and assisting governments with voluntary repatriation. In numerous other documents, including UN General Assembly resolutions and UNHCR Executive Committee conclusions, the importance of ensuring that repatriation is genuinely voluntary is stressed. . . .

“Central to the policy of UNHCR and other inter-governmental organizations has been an assessment of the human rights situation in Rwanda which does not take into account all the available information. AI believes that UNHCR, while acknowledging the occurrence of human rights violations in Rwanda, has continued to declare that it is generally safe for refugees to return and has played down the level of risks which some returnees may face. . . . This failure to acknowledge the real level of human rights violations has had dramatic consequences for refugees in neighboring countries, resulting ultimately in their mass expulsion.”

The AI report notes the collusion with the Rwandan government in forcing exhausted, sick, and hungry refugees to continue walking once they had crossed into Rwanda without being allowed to receive any aid. AI reports that an UNHCR “spokesman in Gisenyi [on the Rwandan border] on 18 November stated ‘there is no indication that the government is deliberately keeping people walking.’ When asked by journalists why UNHCR had not protested at the forcible closure of the medical center, he replied that it was not the role of UNHCR to do so.”