

Rwandan soldiers bayonet two men at hospital

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Kigali, April 11 (Reuter) - Rwandan soldiers bayoneted to death two patients at Kigali's central hospital on Monday where the dying lay on piles of butchered bodies.

Two men in civilian clothes - one of them wounded - had just arrived on foot outside the emergency room when three soldiers walked up to them from behind.

The soldiers pulled out bayonets and plunged them repeatedly into the two men who fell to the ground.

The attack which lasted less than a minute took place in full view of hospital staff and people waiting for treatment. No one moved until the soldiers had walked out of sight.

The two bodies were quickly removed. Witnesses said such killings by the army were common. Seven patients at the hospital, which is surrounded by army checkpoints, were killed on Sunday by troops who beat others with rifle butts.

Aid workers said the two men were apparently targeted because they were members of Rwanda's Tusti minority, which has borne the brunt of massacres at the hands of the Hutu majority since President Juvenile Habyrimana was killed last Wednesday in a rocket attack on his plane.

The hospital, Kigali's largest, faces the Hotel De Diplomats where the country's fragile government is holed up under army guards as battles between government troops and Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels swept towards them on Monday.

The hospital is overflowing with an estimated 700 wounded men, women and children - some lying on dirty mattresses and floors next to corpses draped in blankets.

Relatives, desperate for the two doctors left at the hospital, pleaded with any passing visitor for treatment or help in moving patients to a safer place outside the capital.

At the back of the hospital compound about 40 bodies were rotting in the drizzle, piled in places up to seven metres deep.

A young naked woman lay on the top of the fly-covered, stinking pile, her limbs stiff with rigor mortis. Most of the dead were men but there were also several children - boys and girls with gruesome knife wounds.

Through a dark corridor full of relatives cooking food for patients over open fires and washing in a dirty drain was another pile of about 60 corpses.

On the edge lay two young men – one with his throat cut and the other with stab wounds to his face and chest. They wept in mourning as they tried in vain to pull away from the mound of death.

Men and women standing around the pile burst out laughing when the bodies moved but a grim-looking man in a black coat told journalists : “Please stay here. They are going to kill us all if you leave.”

A doctor said the two wounded men would soon be dead but it was too dangerous to move them.

Despite the mayhem at the hospital, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delegates managed to evacuate more than 100 wounded in two trucks to take them to a hospital in the town of Kabguyi, 50 km (30 miles) southeast of Kigali.

The ICRC requested and received an army escort to protect the casualties as they were carried out on stretchers.

Four soldiers in a car also escorted them on the road to Kabguyi with a pass issued by the defence ministry written on a piece of paper ripped from a school book.

ICRC officials said a surgical team with much needed basic medical supplies was expected to arrive at the hospital on Tuesday.

Before the army escort arrived, a patrol of French paratroopers arrived in vehicles mounted with machine guns and drove into the hospital.

An ICRC official said he was happy to see them because the atmosphere was extremely tense and he believed the casualties would need protection as they left the hospital.

The officer in charge asked whether the wounded were Hutus or Tutsis. When told they were mostly Tutsis he said he had orders to tour the area and could not stay at the hospital. The heavily armed patrol of about 15 French soldiers in red berets then drove off.

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