

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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José Ayala Lasso
High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations Office at Geneva
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April 27, 1994

Fax: 41 22 917 0214

Dear High Commissioner Lasso:

Thank you for your faxes of April 26 requesting current information about the terrible situation in Rwanda. We are pleased that you are giving your urgent attention to the crisis in that country and welcome this opportunity to make suggestions as to the role that you might play in seeking a resolution.

As you are aware, it has been extremely difficult to obtain reliable information about the exact extent of the atrocities being committed, although it is certain that tens of thousands, perhaps over 100,000, people have been killed. These killings are continuing unabated.

The most recent incidents of which we have heard include the following:

- The killing of 4,000 civilians at the parish of Shanghi, 2,000 at Mibirizi, and 800 at Nkanka, all in the diocese of Cyangugu;
- The killing of 4,000 refugees at Kibeho in the diocese of Gikongoro;
- Priests who fled Butare, in southern Rwanda, reported that killings of Tutsi began on the afternoon of April 20 and continued day and night until their departure on April 23.

This violence is neither random nor the inevitable consequence of age-old hatreds. The killings are being carried out by members of the Presidential Guard and by nonuniformed militias trained over the last few years by several political parties within the coalition government, including President Habyarimana's own party, the Mouvement Républicain National pour la Démocratie et le Développement (MRND), and his main ally, the Coalition pour la Défense de la République (CDR). Some killings are also being carried out by Hutu civilians who have been armed by the government and incited to violence by daily radio broadcasts urging Hutus to attack Tutsis. During the first few days after the plane carrying President Habyarimana was shot down, both Hutu opponents of the government and Tutsis were the targets of attack; since then, by far the majority of the victims have been Tutsi.

The violence appears to be designed, by Hutu hardliners surrounding the late president, to derail the peace agreement signed in August 1993 between the Rwandan government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the largely Tutsi armed rebel movement. The parties had agreed to a ceasefire (the latest of a series), the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping force, the establishment of a transitional government, the integration of armed forces into a single army and the return of refugees. Tutsis have been branded as the enemy by the government in part because of the activities of the RPF, which invaded Rwanda in October 1990, seeking to overthrow the Hutu government. However, the massacres of Tutsi civilians simply on the basis of their ethnic identity bear no relation to the conflict between the RPF and the Rwandan army. The victims are overwhelmingly unarmed men, women and children in areas where there is no military engagement at all. Moreover, although the RPF has now gained control of substantial areas of Kigali, we have heard few reports of occasions on which RPF soldiers have killed Hutu civilians.

We believe, with the International Committee of the Red Cross, that the systematic massacre of Tutsi civilians by the presidential guard and party militias amounts to a campaign of genocide, as defined in the Genocide Convention. As such, the international community, specifically states who are signatories of the convention (which includes the five permanent representatives of the Security Council), has a duty to prevent these atrocities and punish those who are responsible.

An important consequence of the planned and deliberate nature of the violence is that it can be stopped. Specific individuals within the Rwandan military are responsible for these atrocities and have the power to order that the killing cease. These individual officers include:

- Colonel Bagosora, the military officer in charge during the first days of the massacres;
- Colonel Augustin Bizimungu, now Commander in Chief of the Rwandan Armed Forces;
- Colonel Mpiranya, the commander of the Presidential Guard;
- Captain Pasqual Simbikangwa, an officer implicated in many killings and cases of torture who is reportedly directing militia attacks on Tutsis from the office of the president;
- Colonel Nkundiye, who trained many members of the MRND militia.

As a first and important step we are calling for these individuals to be named and condemned in statements by foreign governments and intergovernmental agencies. We attach a copy of a statement by the U.S. National Security Advisor, Mr. Tony Lake, speaking on behalf of the White House, in which he has identified the individuals responsible. A statement of this nature from your office would be an important contribution to this effort. In addition, it should be made clear by all concerned that there is

no possibility of foreign aid being given to support a new regime established in this bloody fashion. The Rwandan government is and will continue to be extremely dependent on international assistance, and we believe therefore that even these rhetorical steps, particularly if taken by those governments which have historically had the most influence in Rwanda, would have an important effect on the decisions of those who are using the carnage as a mechanism to stay in power.

In this context, we would welcome your personal contact with officials of foreign governments with influence over the Rwandan military, to convey the message that governments seen to condone the recent atrocities will themselves be subject to international censure. We are particularly disturbed by the decision of the French government to meet with Jerome Bicomumpaka, named Foreign Minister by the military officers who have been exercising power since President Habyarimana was killed, and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, a key leader in the CDR. We strongly object to such meetings, which only serve to confer legitimacy on individuals who are responsible for massive and gross human rights violations. We believe that rather than bestowing international recognition on these criminals, the French government should be urged to exert pressure on the Rwandan military, whom they have armed and trained until very recently, to cease the killings.

Second, we have condemned in the strongest terms the April 21 decision of the Security Council to reduce the United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR) to a skeleton force of only 270 troops. We have appealed to the Security Council to reconsider its decision and to take the necessary steps to protect large groups of Tutsis and opposition political figures who have gathered together for protection, but are being systematically exterminated by the army and militias. There is one such concentration of several thousands at the Amahoro Stadium in Kiyali, which is currently under protection. Approximately 500 people are without food and water in the Hotel des Milles Collines, also in Kigali. They have been attacked several times by Rwandan troops. The bishop of Butare and many of his clergy are besieged at the bishopric and at Karubunda seminary. We have also received reports that some 5,000 civilians have been imprisoned since April 15 in a stadium in Cyangugu in southwestern Rwanda, and that they are without food, water, blankets, or protection from heavy rains. The Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Bukavu, Zaire, has called on the U.N. to rescue this group.

Third, we strongly urge the U.N. to appoint a high level individual to Kigali with the task of meeting with the military high command and making them aware that the international community holds them responsible for these appalling deeds. Such a representative must bear in mind that the peace process involving talks between the army and the RPF is important, but

not necessarily sufficient to address the mass slaughter by the army and militias, which largely takes place outside the theater of war. We are thinking of someone of the stature of OAU Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim: we believe that the current Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General in Rwanda, Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh, is not up to the job and should be replaced.

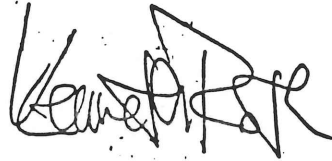
Fourth, a visit by yourself to Rwanda at the earliest possible date to convey this message to Rwandan military leaders and to investigate the extent of the tragedy would be extremely important.

Fifth, we respectfully suggest that you appoint as soon as possible an individual from the Human Rights Centre to travel to Rwanda as your special representative, to take testimony from Rwandans and human rights organizations about the slaughter, and particularly to identify those responsible.

Sixth, we urge you to consider calling for the United Nations Security Council to issue a resolution calling upon the responsible Rwandan military officials to bring to an immediate halt the genocidal atrocities, or face possible prosecution in a tribunal convened to investigate their crimes against humanity.

We appreciate your contacting us, and will be in regular contact with your office. We are sending under separate cover copies of our recent press releases on the situation in Rwanda, as well as reports from the past two years which describe the background to the current atrocities. At such time as you are next in the United States, we would be pleased to meet with you at length to discuss further initiatives on Rwanda.

Respectfully,



Kenneth Roth
Executive Director, Human Rights Watch



Abdullahi an-Na'im
Executive Director, Human Rights Watch/Africa