

Famine threatens almost a million Rwandans

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NAIROBI, May 19 (AFP) - Almost a million Rwandans displaced by the civil war in their country "will soon face famine as they have no real means of subsistence", the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said Wednesday.

The ICRC, "faced with a disaster of such magnitude," called on all the parties in the conflict to reach agreement and allow the refugees to return safely home as soon as possible.

At a press conference in the Kenyan capital, Walter Stocker, head of the ICRC delegation to Kigali, said the refugees "remain completely dependent on political decisions" taken by the main protagonists, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the government in Kigali.

He recommended that the displaced people should be a "priority issue" in the negotiations currently

taking place between the guerrillas and the Kigali government in Arusha in the north of Tanzania.

Stocker said about three million people, or 40 percent of the population of Rwanda, are either directly or indirectly affected by the civil war which has prevailed in the country since the last offensive led by the RPF in February.

The refugees have been living in temporary camps helped by monthly food rations distributed by the ICRC, the World Food Programme and the Rwandan Red Cross. But the ICRC fears the aid will soon run out.

A ceasefire has held since March 9 but the refugees have still not been able to return home due to security reasons, he added.

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