

In Rwanda, Government Goes Hungry

Donatella Lorch

The New York Times, September 18, 1994

Most of the Government ministries have no desks, chairs or telephones. Ministers hitch rides and ask the United Nations to loan them typewriters and send their telexes and faxes. The World Food Program hands out food rations to the civil servants, and no official or soldier has been paid in months.

In the last two months, millions of dollars of international aid has poured into Rwanda to meet food and medical needs, but none of it has gone to the fledgling Government that is trying to organize after a civil war. Though Western donors have praised the new administration, Rwandan Government officials are so frustrated by the lack of direct aid that they suspect some donors of wanting to see them fail.

"We appreciate what is happening to help the dying in the camps," said Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu. "But beyond that, what? Must we get cholera to be helped? "

Senior United Nations officials in Kigali also criticize the lack of assistance as a shortsighted strategy that could delay the return of more than two million refugees and diminish prospects for long-term stability.

Rwandan officials say they are caught in a Catch-22 situation, as Western donors adopt a wait-and-see attitude, stressing that the Govern-

ment must include all political parties before they dispense aid. The European Union has conditioned aid on the return of refugees, a senior Rwandan official said; the Rwandans counter that they need a working government to lure them back, and that a multiparty political system is already in place.

The new Government came to power in mid-July under the auspices of the mostly Tutsi rebels, but it includes a substantial number of Hutu, including the President and Prime Minister.

Rwandan Government officials assert that the international community ignored three months of genocidal massacres in Rwanda, acting only when hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees flooded into neighboring Zaire. Now, they say, it is moving far too slowly in setting up an international tribunal to try Rwandans for war crimes. Most of the victims of the massacres were members of the Tutsi ethnic minority and were slain by Hutu.

Although the United Nations has promised as many as 200 human rights monitors and experts to help investigate the massacres and monitor abuses, only four had arrived by early September.

Yet the monitors' presence is con-

sidered crucial to persuading millions of Rwandans that it is safe to return home. In the absence of prosecution, human rights officials say, reprisals will continue.

"It appears that Goma has taken pre-eminence over genocide carried out with impunity," said Abdul Kabia, executive director of the United Nations mission in Rwanda, speaking of the overwhelmed border town in eastern Zaire that has been the focus of most of the international aid. "We applaud what the international community has done. But let the world not forget."

The American Ambassador in Kigali, David Rawson, insisted that the United States is enthusiastic about helping. He said that the United States wants "a Government good for all the Rwandan people" and that financial aid would come "soon." He de-

clined to give a timetable.

The World Bank says it has \$250 million in loans available to help rebuild Rwanda's shattered economy, and one project would involve money for Government salaries, furniture and computers. But it cannot release the loans until the Rwandans pay \$3.75 million in arrears.

The director of the World Bank, Francisco Aguirre-Sacasa, said he hoped to persuade Western donors like the United States, Belgium and the 12-nation European Union to help pay off the arrears.

"My own impression is that this is a serious government," Mr. Aguirre-Sacasa said. "They are concerned about national reconciliation. Some are actually passionate about national reconciliation. We have to help this Government get back on its feet."