

Kinshasa criticized by UN rights chief over massacre mission

AFP, September 19, 1997

GENEVA, Sept 19 (AFP) - New UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, on Friday added her voice to a growing chorus of critics blaming Kinshasa for blocking a UN mission trying to investigate charges of mass killings of Rwandan Hutus in former Zaire.

"I was dismayed at the rejection by the authorities in Kinshasa of the joint investigative mission", Robinson said in a statement at the end of the first week in her new post.

"It is essential that there be a thorough investigation which goes at least some way to ascertaining the facts and responsibility for the deaths of a large number of refugees and others over the past year."

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan authorized the mission to the renamed Democratic Republic of Congo after the failure of two attempts earlier this year to dig up grave sites in the wake of objections from the new

regime of President Laurent Kabila.

The three investigators on the team have been stuck in Kinshasa for over a month.

They face a year-end deadline for submitting a report to the UN General Assembly which is supposed to shed light on atrocities allegedly committed in the country beginning in 1993 and covering the period when Kabila's forces fought their way to Kinshasa, unseating the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko.

Kabila's conquering armies have been accused of murdering thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees who remained in the country after hundreds of thousands of others went back home after a three-year exile following Rwanda's genocidal civil war.

"If there is no day of reckoning then we will send the wrong message and invite further suffering in the Great Lakes region and elsewhere," Robinson, 53, said.

The UN's top rights chief applauded Annan's efforts to keep the investigation alive under his own authority, calling his initiative a "powerful precedent."

The former Irish president vowed on her first day at the UN's European headquarters here to stand up for victims of injustice worldwide.

In a press briefing Thursday, she

championed a broader interpretation of human rights which she said would help narrow the "gulf" between north and south in their perception of rights issues.

Robinson leaves Sunday for New York to attend a two-week General Assembly session.

tjf/km