

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH/AFRICA

Formerly Africa Watch

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May 16, 1994

The Honorable William J. Clinton
The White House
Washington, DC

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Dear Mr. President,

The war between the Rwandan army and the Rwandan Patriotic Front is a problem that calls for a Rwandan solution. The United States has played an important and appropriate role in encouraging negotiations to that end.

The slaughter of two hundred thousand unarmed and unresisting civilians is, however, far more than a Rwandan problem. Given this extraordinary violation of the international laws of war, this catastrophe confronts the United States and all other nations with a moral imperative that transcends all usual boundaries. The United States must press urgently for an increased United Nations force not to separate the contending armies but to protect these defenseless civilians from murderous militia.

On April 6, some eighteen hours before the war resumed, the self-proclaimed Rwandan government began genocide against the Tutsi and massacres of Hutu willing to join Tutsi in establishing a more democratic government. These ruthless killings were planned for months in advance, prepared for by a virulent propaganda campaign over the radio, by the recruitment and training of militia attached to the MRND and CDR political parties, and by the distribution of thousands of guns to militia members and other supporters of the late President Juvenal Habyarimana. The massacres began in the capital but now take place mostly in the south and west, areas far removed from the front lines.

We know you have followed the suffering that this catastrophe has imposed on one individual, Monique Mujawamariya, who was fortunate enough to escape with her life. We are sure you have seen pictures of the carnage on television and in news photographs and that you have heard the ever-mounting estimates of the death toll.

You have expressed your distress publicly and you have condemned the killings. Welcome though such expressions are, they fall far short of what the situation demands.

**HUMAN
RIGHTS
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The United States played the leading role in reducing the United Nations force in Rwanda on April 22. Whatever the reasons prompting this decision, both the militia and their victims saw it as a signal that the massacres could continue without hindrance. The United States subsequently changed its position and indicated it would be willing to support sending more United Nations troops to Rwanda. But when the Security Council met last Friday to consider a resolution to this effect, the United States representative had "no instructions" and thus could not vote. This effectively blocked all action and postponed consideration of the issue for three days, three days more of bloodshed.

We are appalled at the lack of urgency in handling this crisis. Of course the situation is complex, but much of the current debate serves no purpose and through delay costs more lives. Discussions over whether to send reinforcements to Kigali to work outward or to the frontiers to move inward, for example, may well be irrelevant by the date -- apparently a minimum of a week from now -- when the first soldiers would actually arrive in Rwanda. Such decisions must be made by the appropriate military authorities when the time comes.

The self-proclaimed government of Rwanda says the slaughter of civilians will continue until there is a cease-fire. Sending troops to protect noncombatants will undercut the position of these extremists. Calling upon them by name and making clear their culpability, as the White House did in its press release of April 22, isolates them as well. But the international community must weaken them further by making it clear that any regime they establish will never receive any form of assistance. We have called upon the State Department to enlist other donor nations and multinational agencies in making a joint declaration to this effect. No result. A proposal that you ask other heads of state either to join in such a statement or to issue similar and simultaneous statements was refused. We find it impossible to understand why joint action is so difficult to mobilize in this instance when it has been used in the past on at least two occasions to achieve desired goals in the Rwandan dispute.

The Tutsi of Rwanda numbered about one million people before April 6. At least twenty percent and perhaps as many as thirty percent of those people are now dead, as are tens of thousands of Hutu whose only crime was their tolerance of Tutsi. Of those who are left, we hear from some daily. They include an employee of the U.S. embassy, his wife and their ten-month-old baby, who are the last Tutsi left in their neighborhood in Kigali; the mother and her three daughters who are hiding in the ceiling of a house; and the doctor who is trying to treat the wounded among the 300 people trapped in the Hotel des Milles Collines. They ask every day, "What is the United States doing about the massacres? When will the United Nations troops be sent?" They say, "Please hurry." As for the others in regions where telephones no longer function, we have no news. But we do not need to hear their voices to know that they are asking the same questions and making the same pleas for urgent action.

The continuing massacres in Rwanda increase tensions in Burundi enormously, while the lack of international reaction to the slaughter strengthens the position of Burundi

extremists on both sides who want to resume violence there. Why should they hesitate, given the apparent international tolerance of genocide as a political strategy?

Today the Security Council will again consider sending United Nations troops to Rwanda. Will you tell members of your National Security Council and State Department that the United States is to play a leading role in getting that resolution passed today and that this government stands ready to do whatever is necessary to get the troops en route immediately?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alison Des Forges". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Alison Des Forges
Human Rights Watch/Africa