

Rains and Disease Ravage Refugees Fleeing Rwanda

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Barely two days after a harrowing and exhausting escape from Rwanda, the more than a quarter-million refugees who arrived here were soaked by heavy rains, adding to the miseries of their makeshift lives with little shelter or food.

Some had umbrellas to hide under, and a few strung out plastic tarpaulins or thatched together grass huts. But in this wide-open land, most just weathered the downpours with nothing.

Barefoot children squatted on the roadside shivering in oversized torn sweaters. Families huddled together for warmth, matting down the elephant grass. The rain washed out most of the campfires many had built to cook their meager supplies of food.

At the newly created health center, there were no doctors, just one medical assistant to deal with a long line of people suffering from malaria, tuberculosis and pneumonia. One woman came in with an old bullet wound; a man had a suppurating machete gash to his shoulder. In a side room, a woman was giving birth. Attempts at Organization

In this new home to the refugees, a lush green plain about 20 miles from the border, there were also the first attempts at organization. Tanzanian Red Cross and United Nations officials be-

gan to try to settle the Rwandans according to their communities of origin as part of an effort to organize food distribution that is to begin on Monday. Continue reading the main story

There was an uninterrupted flow of people : women with mattresses on their heads and babies tied to their backs, children lugging firewood and jerrycans full of water, men tugging along goats and sheep.

Some started small businesses in the grass, selling porridge by the cupful from large boiling pots. But few could afford it.

"We have nothing to eat," said Francois Hakizadera, 34, an electrician who worked in the Rwandan town of Kibungo and walked for more than a week to get to the border. "We have nothing to protect ourselves against the rain. The water is dirty and people go to the bathroom everywhere. But I will only go back to Rwanda when there is peace." Most Are Hutus

In one of the largest and fastest refugee exoduses, the more than 250,000 Rwandans fled across the border in a 25-hour period that began on Thursday afternoon. Most belong to the majority Hutu ethnic group and came from southeastern Rwanda.

The tiny central African country

fell into civil war and anarchy on April 6 when President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was killed along with President Cyprien Ntaryamina of Burundi in a plane explosion near the Rwandan capital, Kigali.

President Habyarimana's death, on the eve of the carrying out of a peace accord between the Hutu-dominated Government and the minority Tutsis, touched off widescale massacres against the Tutsis by Hutu hard-liners in the military and militias.

The military also killed all moderate Hutu members of the Government, eliminating any future opposition, human rights groups say. Relief workers say more than 100,000 people have been killed.

The rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front, formed mostly from Tutsi exiles, immediately began a military campaign aimed, rebels say, at ending the chaos and killings. Already the rebels control more than half of the country.

The refugee exodus here is unlike that from other parts of Rwanda, where those who have managed to cross into neighboring countries are mostly Tutsis persecuted by the Hutu militias, bringing with them tales of horror and carnage as well as severe machete wounds.

Most of the refugees here were not wounded and said they were fleeing the advance of soldiers of the Patriotic Front. Most seem to have fled as a huge wave of panic and fear of retribution from the Tutsi soldiers spread through their communities.

They were initially blocked at the border by the Rwandan Army and managed to cross into Tanzania after the army fled and before the rebels arrived. The rebels now control the border area. United Nations officials here say the rebels have closed down the bor-

der, but the rebels deny that. 'Afraid of Revenge'

"The R.P.F. told us the Hutus had to be pushed out of Rwanda for 30 years, the same way that they had been pushed into exile for 30 years," said Paul Mushimirwa, 43, a farmer. "So we ran."

"Tutsis have been killed," Mr. Hakizadera said. "Other Tutsis have fled. We were afraid of revenge. I didn't see the R.P.F. killing anyone, because I was fleeing. As soon as there is peace I will go back, because the conditions of life here are horrible."

Several Rwandans interviewed said that like the Hutu militias, the rebel soldiers had lists of people they searched for and killed, but no one interviewed had witnessed the killings or any massacres.

In fact, several people said massacres of Tutsis had been carried out by Hutu militias before the rebels had arrived. They said the rebels had told the Hutus to leave their homes, part of a tactic they had used before in an effort to clear fighting areas of civilians as well as to avoid accusations that the Patriotic Front was involved in civilian massacres.

"First the army told us we couldn't leave," said a Rwandan journalist who asked to remain anonymous because his family was still in Kigali and he was worried about their safety. "They told us Rwandans couldn't leave the country."

"Almost all the people killed in our area were Tutsis killed by Hutu militia. The front came and they had lists, and they killed only those on the lists. I think eventually peace will come. But I think it will happen all over again in 10 years. I saw the same massacres in 1959, 1963 and 1973."