

Stampede Raises Toll in Rwanda Chaos

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A day that began in desperation and chaos turned into one of panic and death as the rebels who control most of Rwanda advanced toward the border with Zaire today, causing terrified refugees to stampede. At least 30 died.

At midafternoon, rebel mortar shells began exploding in Gisenyi, in northwestern Rwanda, where refugees had jammed the border crossing hoping to escape the civil war.

The number of refugees crowding Goma was estimated at nearly a million today, severely straining international relief efforts.

“Within 48 hours, I am afraid we are going to have hundreds of people dying daily,” said Panos Mourtzis, a spokesman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

As they ran along dusty roads and across fields on the shore of Lake Kivu, the fleeing refugees raised a choking dust. The air was filled with the cacophony of crying children – crying from pain, from lack of food, from fear, from simple exhaustion. Many refugees have been on the run for more than a week.

Here and there were piles of automatic rifles, abandoned by fleeing soldiers of the Rwandan Army. The scrambling refugees stumbled over live hand grenades. Many soldiers were taking off their uniforms. Hundreds rode atop trucks.

In a field just off the road from the border was the body of a man covered with black dust. Farther along in a confusion of garbage and people was the body of a boy who looked about 10 years old. In the pandemonium it was impossible to know whether they had died from disease, or had been trampled to death, or had died of exhaustion. Nearby lay a pair of crutches. A tiny emaciated child sat by an open fire.

A French photographer, Charles Caratini, found at least 30 and perhaps as many as 50 bodies, mostly children, who had been killed in a stampede about 300 feet from the border. Another photographer said two mortar shells had fallen on the Zairian side of the border about 5 P.M. today, killing at least 20 refugees, but it was not known who had fired them.

It was impossible to enter Gisenyi to determine how many civilians have been killed in the town, the last major community to fall to the rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front. But Gisenyi was jammed with refugees, and some Rwandan Army troops were still there.

The front, dominated by the Tutsi ethnic minority, continued to reject international calls for a cease-fire and threatened to attack the “safe haven” in southwestern Rwanda where the

French are protecting at least a million Hutu.

“Moving in is our ambition unless the French hand over the criminals,” a spokesman for the front, Maj. Wilson Rutiyisire, said in the capital, Kigali. The “criminals,” according to the rebels, are the mostly Hutu Government officials and militia leaders whom the front considers responsible for the massacre of possibly hundreds of thousands of Tutsi since early April.

In Goma today, three mortar shells landed near the airport, but it was not known who had fired them. [The United Nations suspended its emergency airlift to Goma, Reuters reported from Paris, quoting a French television report. [The report also said there had been several clashes during the day between French troops and members of the Rwandan Patriotic Front in the French-patrolled zone in southwestern Rwanda. “No infiltration by any armed elements will be tolerated,” the Foreign Ministry said.]

Tracers in the Sky

As night fell in Goma, tracer rounds lit up the sky and there was heavy shooting on the streets, which were clogged with refugees. Like so much on this tumultuous day, it was impossible to know what the shooting was about or who was firing. A French officer was seriously wounded when a ricocheting bullet struck him in the chest.

Even before this afternoon’s mayhem, relief officials were staggering under the refugee burden. “We feel absolutely exhausted and desperate,” Mr. Mountzis, the United Nations spokesman, said earlier in the day. “Somehow we feel there is no end to it.”

When the Rwandan Patriotic Front began to move in on Gisenyi late Saturday night, the refugees began swarming toward the border, and by noon today more than 300,000 had crossed, bringing to nearly a million the number who have arrived here in the last five days, United Nations workers estimate.

“It is impossible to find enough camps for one million people,” Mr. Mountzis said. “The land is volcanic; we can’t drill for water. What are we going to do about latrines? It is an absolute nightmare. I don’t know how we are going to deal with it.”

Beyond Aid, a Cease-Fire

Eight million gallons of water and at least 800 tons of food a day were needed, four times what the United Nations is providing for Sarajevo, he added.

But more than aid is needed, he said: the international community has to exert political pressure “for an immediate and unconditional cease-fire.”

Though Mr. Mountzis was careful to say that “we blame both sides” for continuing the war, it has become increasingly clear that it is primarily the R.P.F. that has chosen to continue the war, and it is the front’s advances that are pushing the refugees into Zaire.

“It is difficult to understand” why the front continues to advance, Mr. Mountzis said. Another United Nations official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, was more direct. “There is no need for the R.P.F. to keep fighting,” he said. “They’ve got the country. They are giving credence to the charges that they want to force all the Hutu out of the country, that they

want the land to resettle Tutsi.” Virtually all the refugees here are Hutu.

In the mob of fleeing refugees today, Jean Damascene Kamyamuhanda held up a stick with a piece of paper on the end of it on which he had written that he was offering a reward for anyone who could locate his son. “His name is Gasore,” the handwritten note said. “He is 8 years old.”

Mr. Kamyamuhanda, a farmer, who has been on the run from advancing rebel forces for more than a week, became separated from his son on Saturday evening. On Friday he had become separated from his wife and another child.

“So many people have been killed on the road,” he said, “I really have no hope to find them.” A 10-year-old girl,

Zuba, held the hand of Wenant Mpabnyanga, 30, and cried as she told about having become separated from her parents.

“I found her on the road and took her with me,” Mr. Mpabnyanga said. “I don’t know her.” Mr. Mpabnyanga was separated from his wife and three sons on Friday afternoon. His daughter sat on the ground, shivering with malaria.

Nearby, Sephine Nyiransengimana, who was separated from her husband and 3-year-old daughter, sat on a volcanic rock, nursing her 6-week-old son. She has named him Niyonsenga, which means “to God I pray.”

“I said to myself, I will keep on praying to God,” she said. “I will pray to God to save me during this war.”