

Rwandan resistance leader denies attack on refugee camp

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WASHINGTON, July 9 (AFP) - The military leader of the Rwandan resistance denied Thursday that his forces had attacked a refugee camp housing more than 40,000 people displaced by civil war in the East African country.

Paul Kagame, vice president and military commander of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR), said about 200 FPR forces retaliated with firearms and artillery when they came under attack by an equal number of government troops early Tuesday near Miyove.

"Our purpose was not to attack the refugee camp," Kagame said. "Government forces attacked our positions from the direction (of the refugee camp) ... and we repulsed them."

He indicated that refugees at the Miyove camp, which shelters more than 40,000 people in the northeastern Byumba region, were caught in the crossfire.

Casualties among troops, guerrillas and refugees remain unknown, Kagame said in a telephone interview at the end of a week-long visit here.

A U.S. State Department official said Kagame, on a private visit, paid a brief courtesy call Monday on Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen and held lengthy talks Tuesday with technical experts on implementing a ceasefire in Rwanda.

The FPR, which accuses the Kigali government of abusing human rights and fomenting ethnic strife, launched its first offensive in October 1990 from neighbouring Uganda.

In Kigali, officials Wednesday accused the FPR of shelling the camp and panicking refugees, who lack adequate food and water and are developing cholera.

Both sides estimate the number of people displaced by the civil war at around 283,000. Representatives

of the guerrillas and the government were to hold peace talks Friday at Arusha, northern Tanzania. minority Tutsis and former members of the Ugandan army.

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Many of the guerrillas are exiled