

Tutsi refugees from DR Congo flee to Rwanda

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GOMA, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sept 15 (AFP) - More than 3,300 Tutsis fled into neighbouring Rwanda at the weekend amid unrest in the Masisi region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, UN officials said Monday.

The UN refugee agency UNHCR said they set up around the northwest Rwandan town of Gisenyi.

Informed sources said their decision to move coincided with the departure from Masisi of Rwandan Tutsi soldiers who had fought alongside the troops of Laurent Kabila, now president of the DRC.

The soldiers are being replaced by Congolese officers. As they leave, the Tutsis no longer felt safe in a region where Hutu extremists remain active.

The refugees "came under several attacks from rebel groups in the Masisi region and no longer felt safe. At Goma, when they saw the Rwandan soldiers leave, they decided to cross the border," a humanitarian source said.

It was not clear how many of them were on the move however. The UNHCR said they numbered 4,000, but Frankee De Jonge of Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF - Doctors without Borders) said MSF distributed water to some 7,000.

"We went to see them on Saturday and they had all gone," he added, but was unable to say if they had all crossed the border.

Many of the refugees have been sent to Mudende camp near Gisenyi, which was attacked by Hutu extremists last month with the loss of 148 refugees. Rwandan authorities say it is now safe.

Reports have emerged in recent weeks of growing unrest in Masisi. None of the international aid agencies contacted by AFP have been there recently and one said it had been advised not to go until the situation had eased.

The hilly, almost inaccessible Masisi region is considered by Rwanda as a base for Hutu extremists mounting

attacks into Rwanda.

Various ethnic groups also inhabit the region. "Some use ultra-modern arms, others practise sorcery and only have machetes. The only thing we know is that they all kill," the humanitarian source said.

On Saturday, Lauchlan Munro, a principal administrator for the UN Chil-

dren's Fund (UNICEF), told AFP that some 8,000 Tutsis from the Masisi region arrived in Goma, in western Rwanda, two weeks ago.

He said they had witnessed big troop movements, and he also told of major clashes having taken place in recent weeks.

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