

# UN envoy fears Zairean violence "worse than Rwanda"

AFP, February 23, 1995

GENEVA, Feb 23 (AFP) - Zaire could face massacres on a scale far worse than anything seen in Rwanda because of the lack of progress toward democracy, a UN human rights envoy said in a report published Thursday.

Roberto Garreton said ethnic tension in Zaire could produce "an explosion whose effects would be much worse than Rwanda or Burundi."

Zaire, a vast central African nation, is suffering from near anarchy and the security forces' utter contempt for citizens' lives, the UN official said.

"The current level of tension and the rivalry provoked between the tribes and the regions all stirred up by the arrival of massive numbers of Rwandan refugees, makes me fear" vast massacres, he said.

Garreton demanded that the international community engage in urgent preventive diplomacy, not to strengthen the rule of long-time au-

thoritarian ruler Mobutu Sese Seko but promote democracy.

France and Belgium last year renewed ties with Zaire following Mobutu's agreement to let France use Zairean territory for its military intervention in Rwanda.

Garreton Thursday called on countries friendly to Zaire to put pressure on Kinshasa not to further delay its transition to democracy.

The Zairean government has promised to hold free elections this year but Garreton said that despite some improvement in freedom of expression, nothing had been done so far to organise any elections. He called for international technical and financial assistance to facilitate the electoral process.

Garreton said at least 3,000 people had been killed and 150,000 forced to leave their homes in eastern Kivu region in 1993 following ethnic violence.

The situation had deteriorated after the arrival in 1994 of 1.2 million Rwandan Hutus following massacres during which up to one million Rwandans were killed between April and June last year.

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