

UN Dithers on Rwanda Rescue as Tutsi Hail French Troops

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From Sam Kiley in Bisesero, near Kibuye, and Charles Bremner in Paris.

The United Nations yesterday put off an attempt to rescue a group of unaccompanied Rwandan children and orphans among 30,000 civilians it says are trapped in Kigali by the civil war.

After days of intense fighting, the capital was ominously silent for much of the night but the UN said it had postponed plans to evacuate about 200 trapped Tutsi - mostly children - after failing to win guarantees of safe passage.

As the UN hesitated, French troops fanned out across the southwest of the country to prevent fresh massacres after the killing of tens of thousands of people in two months of ethnic and related bloodletting. In Paris, French leaders claimed that their military expedition had won over the endangered Tutsi population and that growing international support was vindicating the decision to send troops in.

"We have managed to get ourselves accepted as a force for peace," said Francois Leotard, the Defence Minister, in a report on the success so far of what France depicts as a purely humanitarian mission. He said

that the main problem France now faced was to draw in the help of non-government humanitarian organisations to take care of the protected population and to encourage African states to send troops "to support and replace us".

The slaughter of Tutsi by Rwandan government supporters continued unabated in spite of a meeting between the government and the Pope's envoy, who pleaded for an end to the killings.

When the French troops left Gisenyi, where Cardinal Roger Etchegaray met representatives of the Rwandan government, houses continued to burn in the commune of Bisesero, ten miles inland from Lake Kivu near Kibuye. A source close to the cardinal said that his plans this week included meetings with members of the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front.

Murderer's mission: Sylvester Gscumbitsi, blamed for the massacre of 3,000 people in one of the worst atrocities in Rwanda, is in charge of distributing international food aid to members of Rwanda's majority Hutu tribe in a refugee camp in Tanzania, according to a BBC Panorama programme to be shown tonight.