

We have defeated the 'forces of evil' - president

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KIGALI, Dec 31 (AFP) - Rwanda's President Pasteur Bizimungu said his compatriots had defeated the "forces of evil" in a message to close a year that saw more than 500,000 people killed in a genocidal civil war.

"The year 1994 was a year of distress, anguish and pain for Rwandans," Bizimungu said, according to Radio Rwanda on Saturday. "Rwanda was nevertheless once reputed to be a country where milk and honey flowed."

"But we must congratulate ourselves on the fact that we have been able to defeat the forces of evil," the president added in an address Friday to members of the coalition government and the diplomatic corps.

Bizimungu and his government colleagues planned to spend New Year's Eve with orphaned and unaccompanied children in different parts of the central African country, where

almost 150,000 youngsters are without families, according to official estimates.

The president, a member of the Hutu majority ethnic group, was installed after rebels of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) seized control of the capital Kigali in July, following three months of slaughter.

The new authorities have blamed Hutu extremists and former government troops for unleashing the genocide of minority Tutsis after former president Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in a suspected rocket attack on his plane in April.

UN officials here and relief workers have charged that some RPF soldiers are also guilty of reprisal massacres. The UN Security Council has moved to set up a war crimes tribunal for Rwanda.

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