

THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN RWANDA

ISSUE

The state of civil war that has prevailed in Rwanda since the attack by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in October 1990 has caused numerous human rights violations. However, the situation triggered by the destruction of the presidential aircraft on April 6, 1994 has assumed catastrophic proportions. The ensuing massacres have created one of the postwar era's worst tragedies, leaving some two million refugees, an almost equal number of displaced persons within the country, and between a half-million and a million dead.

BACKGROUND

The massacres triggered by the destruction of the presidential aircraft were so widespread and so sudden that they left no doubt whatsoever as to their having been planned in every detail. Elements of the Army and the Presidential Guard began by attacking political opponents of the presidential side, and then letting the Hutu militia enter the fray, attacking mainly the Tutsis. After 10 of its Blue Helmets were killed, Belgium withdrew its UNAMIR contingent. Without its best-trained, best-equipped units, UNAMIR had to withdraw its powerless troops until a stronger Security Council mandate was forthcoming. With only 400 soldiers at its disposal, UNAMIR was in no position to protect civilians from being massacred. The situation has now changed. UNAMIR, 5,500-strong since the end of August, is now in a position to guarantee a measure of security. The presence of 100 UN human rights observers as of January 1995 should also help matters.

Insecurity in the camps, especially in Zaire, has caused great concern to the Canadian government. In response to a request from Minister Ouellet asking him to consider the problem, the UN Secretary General has produced a report outlining three possible courses of action: 1) Send 3,000 Blue Helmets for 24 months or 5,000 for 10 months to establish security zones in the camps, one after the other; 2) Send between 10,000 and 12,000 Blue Helmets to separate the militia and military from the civilians, by virtue of UN Charter Chapter VII; or 3) send a force under the auspices of Chapter VII.

Ideally the second option appears to be the most effective, but given the current troop-contributor fatigue, the first option seems more realistic. Without making any decisions on the organizing of an intervention force, the Security Council has asked the Secretary-General to obtain more information about the costs and countries interested in providing troops under Option One. Many countries have been approached to provide mechanized units, but no affirmative replies were known to have been given at the time of writing. On the other hand, the Security Council decision to set up an international tribunal to judge those responsible for the genocide was a positive one, and Canada would like to see it become functional as soon as possible. The virtually nonexistent judicial system also needs to be restored, and the government needs assistance in order to function.