

# **BURUNDI, RWANDA, TANZANIA, UGANDA & ZAIRE: RWANDAN AND BURUNDIAN REFUGEES**

27 October 1996

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## **EMERGENCY REPORT - KIVU CRISIS**

### ***Summary***

*Following the sudden displacement of more than half a million refugees in eastern Zaire and the forced evacuation of virtually all aid agencies, minimally-staffed Federation sub-Delegations remain on the forefront of what is becoming a humanitarian catastrophe. Two delegates in Goma and three delegates in Bukavu are co-ordinating the limited activities of the Red Cross Society of the Republic of Zaire. The two organisations are part of the minimal humanitarian network left with the responsibility of assisting more than one million refugees.*

### ***The context***

Since the beginning of the month of October, increasing signs of instability were reported in the region of south Kivu, in eastern Zaire. Issues of nationality and land rights for 250,000 to 400,000 ethnic Tutsi, known as Banyamulenge, fuelled a series of clashes between them, the local population and the Zairian army. The Banyamulenge have been present in the region located between the towns of Uvira and Bukavu since as far back as the eighteenth century. Instability in south Kivu was simultaneous with ever-increasing tension in north Kivu, specially in the Masisi area, where several ethnic groups have been clashing more or less violently over the last two years.

The situation quickly took a turn for the worse on 12 October, when a senior official of the local administration in Bukavu gave the Tutsis one week to leave the country before being treated as "rebels" by the Zairian army. This triggered violent reactions from the Banyamulenge, who attacked camps around Uvira, where Hutu refugees were settled. From October 13, refugees started leaving the camps, fleeing increasing insecurity; 20,000 were reported to have left on 14 October, heading north; on 18 October, UNHCR was forced to suspend its activities in the camps of Runing, Biriba and Kagunga, where more than 30,000 refugees were housed. While the number of reports about the intensification of the fighting

increased, 46,000 refugees were said to be *en route* on the 18 October, 110,000 on the 20 October.

On 21 October, UNHCR announced that "almost a quarter of a million Rwandan and Burundian Hutu refugees have abandoned all their 12 camps around the town of Uvira, where the army is battling Tutsi rebels." Meanwhile, the situation was reportedly going out of control in north Kivu as well, where fighting and attacks on villages were claiming an increasing number of lives.

## ***Latest events - Chronology***

### **October 21**

With the entire area subject to high insecurity -Banyamulenge are reported to have taken control of the main road between Uvira and Bukavu and fighting is widespread - it is not yet clear where the bulk of this population is moving to. Most sources point to the refugee camps of Nyangezi 1 and 2, immediately south of Bukavu, as the most likely destination. The consequences of suddenly multiplying the refugee population in these camps by four are particularly worrisome.

### **October 22**

A few thousands refugees have reached Bukavu. The day before, an unspecified number of refugees were reported to have arrived in the camps of Nyangezi 1 and 2. But, on the afternoon of the 22nd, the entire population of the two camps, plus the newly-arrived refugees were reported to have left the camps, taking blindès with them, after having looted the scarce foodstocks in the warehouses.

It is still unclear where these people (estimated to number between 25,000 and 50,000) are moving to, the most likely destinations being the camp of Nyamirangwe, west of Bukavu, or the town of Bukavu itself. Even less clear, at the time, is the fate of the bulk of the population who had left the camps in Uvira region (over 200,000) and who have not yet made it to the relatively safe area of Bukavu. They are likely to be trapped between areas of intense fighting in the south (Uvira town) and in the north (escarpment, 40-50 km south of Bukavu).

The dramatic and uncertain humanitarian situation is worsened by the fact that both supply lines to Bukavu are cut and that WFP reports having food in stock only for one week and only for the refugees already present in the area.

From the security point of view, while the situation in Uvira is clearly out of control (the UN, the NGOs and the ICRC having evacuated all expatriate personnel with considerable difficulty), Bukavu is still relatively calm. No fighting is reported near the town and everything seems rather normal - the airport is functioning and the road from the town to the airport practicable.

### **October 23**

An estimated 100,000 people - including Rwandan and Burundian refugees plus Zairian civilians displaced by the conflict - are reported to have reached Bukavu. They have split into two groups according to the latest information from the field (early afternoon); 60,000 have passed the camp of Nyamirangwe and are heading for the camp of Kimanga (25 km south-west of Bukavu); 40,000 should be heading back to the Nyangezi 1 and 2 camps which were emptied only yesterday.

In Goma, the situation in Kibumba camp returned to normal after the previous day's incident when a wave of panic was created by Zairian civilians fleeing the attacks on their villages rushed into the camp. Part of the population started leaving the camp, but the movement soon stopped. Several injured are being treated in the Federation's hospital in Kibumba.

### **October 24**

A series of events leads to the relocation of non-essential staff from most agencies in Bukavu, including the Federation and the Belgian Red Cross. At 18:00 on 23 October, news came that the sites of Nyangezi (20 km south of Bukavu), where the UNHCR and the Federation were planning to set up a transit camp, was the scene of increasing violence. Some 15 members of the Zairian contingent were captured there by the rebels.

At 20:30 an emergency call from UNHCR summoned all expatriate personnel to the UNHCR compound, under the protection of the Zairian contingent. After having spent the night there, almost 100 expatriates went back to their compounds this morning at 06:00. Reasons for these exceptional security measure were reportedly the proximity of the rebels to the town and the risk of uncontrolled reactions from the military in town.

The increasing tension and the risk for the personal security of aid workers led the Federation to organise the relocation of three of its staff to Nairobi, together with two Belgian Red Cross delegates. Two ICRC delegates were replaced during the day by senior representatives coming from Geneva through Goma. Fifteen UN and NGO staff left the town as well. Over 100,000 people are believed to be scattered on the hills around Bukavu, only a few thousands of which have settled in existing camps.

Security remains tense in and around Goma. A mine incident on the axis road in the early morning leaves five civilians wounded. The road itself is closed to all traffic, including the water tankers. For the first time in months, the border with Rwanda is closed: hundreds of people - reportedly Tutsi - are lining up, trying to cross it. Gunshots have been heard repeatedly in the area.

### **October 25**

After yesterday's partial evacuation from Bukavu, the three remaining delegates are restricted to the Federation compound due to the high insecurity prevailing in town. The looting of vehicles and property continues; all major roads are blocked by checkpoints. No certain information is available about the position of the rebels, believed to be just a few kilometres south of the town. The airport may be functioning but the northern axis road appears too insecure to be used.

1,000 to 1,500 refugees are believed to be on their way to the northern camp of Kashusha, another 10,000 to 15,000 are scattered around the town, and 10,000 to 15,000 have settled in Nyamirangwe camp, saying they are too tired to continue. The remaining 40,000 to 50,000 people are between the camps of Nyamirangwe and Kihanga.

Similarly to what is happening in Bukavu, the looting of vehicles and property intensifies during the day in Goma. Increasing fighting is reported in the immediate surroundings of Kibumba camp. As planned, five delegates are relocated to Nairobi while one experienced logistics delegate, originally scheduled to go to Bukavu, is transferred to Goma to support the minimally-staffed sub-Delegation. Delegates limit their movements to the bare minimum, between the residence and the sub-Delegation.

### **October 26**

The Situation in Bukavu during the morning seems to be out of control. The entire UN and NGO staff (86 expatriates) leave at 11:00, heading towards the airport in a convoy protected by the Zairian military contingent. There are fears that they may encounter armed resistance on their way. In close consultation with the ICRC in Geneva, various options are taken into consideration on how to evacuate the six remaining Red Cross delegates (three Federation, two ICRC and one Belgian Red Cross) who gather at the Federation sub-Delegation. It is decided that they should not leave for the time being.

In the early hours of the afternoon the picture improves a little: the UN-NGO convoy has made it to the airport without major problems and the aid workers have left for Entebbe on two planes. Meanwhile, the situation in town does not seem to have entirely gone out of control, as feared. Information comes that, on their own decisions, ZRCS volunteers are carrying out distributions in Kashusha and Nyamirangwe camps and the Red Cross delegates, the only aid workers left in town, start making contingency plans for to assist almost half a million refugees.

Dramatic events develop in Goma as well, where armed attacks on the north side of Kibumba camp trigger the departure of the entire camp population. In the early hours of the morning, over 200,000 are said to be on their way to Goma. The Federation rapidly loses contact with Kibumba hospital and then with the warehouse. Emergency flights organised by the Federation, the ICRC and the UN are planned to evacuate expatriate personnel. At the last moment, many agencies decide to maintain a minimal presence: 190 of the 230 expatriates leave for Nairobi around noon. The Federation keeps a presence with the Head of sub-Delegation and with a logistics co-ordinator, planning to reinforce the sub-Delegation as soon as a new assessment of the operational needs is done.

### **October 27**

The situation in Bukavu remains extremely tense. There is no information about the position of the rebels and widespread looting - including the UNHCR office - continues in town. Approximately 100,000 of the newly-arrived refugees are reported to have settled between Nyamirangwe and Kihanga camps, 20 to 50 km from the town. The six Red Cross delegates, confined to the Federation Delegation most of the time, continue assessing the situation and identifying, together with the Zairian Red Cross, possible strategies to face the enormous humanitarian challenges.

Tens of thousands of the former Kibumba camp dwellers arrive close to Goma during the night and early morning. They are diverted by the Zairian army towards the camp of Mugunga, a few kilometres north-west of the town. The Head of sub-Delegation reports that by the late morning, almost 60,000 have come to Mugunga, and that a constant flow is expected for the next 24 hours. The main concerns for the refugees are food and water, both in short supply, since no infrastructures are ready to assist the refugees. The Federation is planning to bring in stand-by resources from Nairobi, to ensure assistance is available for this new situation.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

Food and firewood distributions are irregularly carried out in Kashusha and Nyamirangwe camps near Bukavu. As soon as the situation will permit, four emergency water and food distribution points will be set up between the camps of Nyamirangwe and Kihanga, where up to 100,000 recently-displaced refugees have settled and receive no assistance at all. Support to Bukavu hospital is also being considered.

In Goma, food distributions are taking place with some regularity in Kahindo camp, carried out in total autonomy by Zaire Red Cross volunteers. They will continue for the next few days, provided the situation in the camp remains stable. Emergency assistance to the newly-arrived refugees in Mugunga camp is planned to start as soon as possible, including food and non-food distributions, and basic health care. If the situation permits, delegates will return to Goma over the next few days. Support for the Goma hospital, loaded far beyond capacity, also appears to be a priority.

In Geneva, senior staff is closely monitoring the situation, and positive steps have been already taken in order to gear-up Federation capacity in the region. Cargo aeroplanes have been rented. Plans are to have them fly to Goma and/or Bukavu from Monday, October 28th, carrying high-protein biscuits, medical and non-food supplies as well as water-sanitation equipment.

A management team will be deployed on-site in the course of the next two days in order to co-ordinate the establishment of the new operation and reinforce, for the short term, the field operations staff.

The ERU Mass Water/Sanitation (Swedish Red Cross) has been mobilised and is planned to arrive in NBO before 31. Oct. depending on the charter planes available. One ERU Basic Health Care (Norwegian Red Cross) will arrive in NBO on 28 Oct. Additional BHC (Finnish Red Cross) and Specialised Water (Austrian Red Cross) ERUs are alerted and ready to leave on short notice.

## ***Outstanding needs***

Experienced, francophone delegates will most probably be needed in the immediate future. Participating National Societies are specially requested to review their rosters in order to be able to respond to a possible Federation appeal for personnel.

## ***Contributions***

See next sitrep

## ***Conclusion***

***The Federation and the Red Cross Society of the Republic of Zaire, constrained by a volatile and generally insecure environment, continue their efforts to improve the situation of the most vulnerable in a major humanitarian disaster.***

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