

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

03 November 1996

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EMERGENCY REPORT - KIVU CRISIS

Latest events

Goma •

The day of Friday November 1st was one of extreme tension as over 100 expatriate aid workers, including eleven Federation delegates, were caught for hours in crossfire while hiding in one residence on the lakeside, not far from the border with Rwanda. Aid workers had gathered there the day before, after most of the residences and offices had been looted, waiting for the authorisation from the Zairian authorities to cross into Rwanda. Fierce fighting continued from the early morning of Friday well into the afternoon, until Tutsi rebels took control of the town. The delegates spent a much quieter Friday night and were allowed across the border on Saturday morning. From Gisenye they proceeded to Kigali, where they were picked up by Fed 01 aeroplane and safely flown into Nairobi.

Feeling of relief for the safety of the delegates is paired with deep concern for the fate of over a million refugees left virtually without assistance at all and threatened by the conflict approaching the camps. Having lost all means of communication, it is impossible to contact the Zaire Red Cross volunteers and assess how the situation is evolving in the surroundings of Goma and Bukavu. According to UNHCR, it is likely that Kahindo and Katala camps had actually emptied and that refugees are on their way to Mugunga. If that is the case, Goma will soon see the concentration of over 700,000 refugees on the mountainsides around the town. Practically nothing is known about the surroundings of Bukavu. Refugees' access to food, water, sanitation, shelter, health care is extremely limited and likely to totally collapse in the near future. The risk of epidemics is very high and the escalation of the hostilities may well trigger further mass displacements.

The International Federation fears that the situation in Goma and Bukavu has already turned to the worse and that a catastrophe comparable to the 1994 genocide is in the make. Through the Red Cross Society of the Republic of Zaire, the Federation is approaching the Zairian government in order to be allowed to carry out exploratory missions west of Goma and Bukavu. Accessing the refugee population from alternative locations is seen today as the only possible mean to limit the consequences of such a disaster.

Burundi •

Katumba camp, hosting Burundian returnees from Zaire (mostly women and children), is now approaching a population of 10,000. A sharp increase in the death rate (severe diarrhoeal diseases, probably due to Shigella) is a reason for major concern.

Uganda •

An health and water-sanitation assessment mission was quickly dispatched from Nairobi to the two newly-established camps for Zairian refugees in the Kisoro area. Reports from the mission are expected for tomorrow, while provision of basic assistance for over 20,000 could start immediately thanks to the high preparedness of the local branch of the Red Cross Society of Uganda.

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