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RELEASED IN FU

Analyst: Date: 10/10/90 Time: 13:19:25

Distributed to: SWO.ED.S.SS.D.P.SSO.AF.C.SP.M.CMS.TF2.M/FLO.PM.HA.

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FLEEING PEASANTS REPORT MASSACRES BY RWANDAN ARMY

By Aidan Hartley

KIZINGA, Uganda, Reuter - Rwandan peasants accused of supporting a rebel invasion force have been massacred by government troops and members of the majority Hutu tribe, villagers fleeing to Uganda said Wednesday.

Soldiers shot peasants and burned down huts while Hutus hacked women and children with machetes Monday in attacks on at least nine settlements inhabited mainly by the minority Tutsi tribe in northeast Rwanda, the villagers said.

"The army told people to go into the villages, then they opened fire while others burned the houses," Stephen Kabarega, a cattle owner, told Reuters at this town on the Rwandan-Ugandan border.

"Those trying to escape were ambushed by Hutus armed with machetes and spears," Kabarega added.

The death toll has reached hundreds according to the refugees, some of whom showed Reuters wounds from beatings and shrapnel fragments.

Some 400 Rwandans have arrived at the border post of Kizinga since Tuesday after walking through the night and are camping out there.

Small groups of people escaping the killings continue to arrive and are being fed by the Ugandan army, the commanding officer in Kizinga, Captain Simon Kizza said.

The attacks took place about 10 miles from Nyakatale -- a town which fell into rebel hands after they invaded Rwanda from Uganda ten days ago.

"The whole place was littered with bodies, it seems more people died than escaped," said Kabarega.

One woman died after Hutus hacked off her arms and forced them into her mouth, according to Jean-Marie Sebutama, a stone mason. Her two small children, aged one and five, were then slaughtered.

"The government is the enemy of the people. They are killing us like animals," said Kabarega.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF S  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: HARRY R. ME  
DATE/CASE ID: 29 JAN 2002 199500391

59-96-0687 People arriving in Kizinga were dressed in ragged clothes

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One woman, Vestina Karuhimbi told Reuters she walked naked from her ranch 25 miles to the border after being stripped and beaten by government troops.

"They are sleeping out on the ground at the moment but they may be able to find shelter in our church," Augustine Rwanchwenbe, the Kizinga village chief said.

Rwanchwenbe and local officers of the Ugandan army say they will be unable to feed the growing numbers of refugees arriving in Kizinga and are seeking aid from the Kampala government.

Fierce fighting between rebels and government troops is continuing in northeastern Rwanda.

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