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REBELS USED U.S. AS BASE TO PREPARE RWANDA INVASION - ENVOY  
By Carol Giacomo

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WASHINGTON, Reuter - Rwanda's ambassador charged Friday that rebels have been operating out of the United States since 1984, raising money and buying weapons on the black market in preparation for an invasion they launched from Uganda Oct. 1.

The envoy, Aloys Uwimana, told Reuters in an interview that his government warned the United States two years ago "that something would happen at any time" but the suspicions about a potential attack were dismissed.

"We asked them (U.S. officials) to help us to evaluate the situation because we felt that our security was in danger," he said.

"Of course they made some investigation but finally they told us there was nothing serious" going on, he said.

Uwimana also charged that the rebels had diverted funds from private American organizations like the Ford Foundation and the U.S. Committee for Refugees -- without the groups' knowledge -- to use for arms purchases.

Neither the State Department nor the private groups he mentioned could be reached immediately for comment.

Rwanda is fighting an invasion of a rebel army led from Uganda by members of the minority Tutsi tribe. The invaders at one point reached the capital of Kigali before being pushed back by government forces, and are now locked in combat with the army in northeast Rwanda.

Uwimana said the invading rebels numbered 10,000, compared to 7,000 in the Rwandan Army, who have been bolstered by Zairian troops.

Rwanda has sought military help from Belgium; the former colonial power, France and the United States. The first two have turned down a request for direct military aid.

The State Department said Thursday it was considering providing non-lethal aid, like medical help. But Uwimana said he believed the matter of small arms also was still open.

Communications equipment and food are also needed, he said.

Asked if he thought Washington's response to the crisis should be stronger, the envoy replied: "I think so. We are

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right. The situation is clear. We have been invaded by troops from a neighboring country."

He and aides who participated in the interview said they believe rebels have been operating in the United States for six years to get things in place for the invasion.

Embassy Counselor Habimana Christophe said the rebels "are buying weapons from the black market in Florida, Texas and California."

Uwimana said the State Department was given this information and had been told that Washington's failure to act could jeopardize friendly relations between the two countries.

The envoy also said Rwanda had asked the United States to pressure Uganda to close the border to the rebel invaders.

Estimates vary on the number of Rwandans who fled because of violence between the Tutsi and the majority Hutu tribe in past decades, but there are said to be 250,000 in Uganda alone.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has asserted that Rwanda's refusal to seriously address the refugee problem was the cause of the crisis -- a contention Uwimana disputed.

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