

# End Rwandans' Exile, and Halt Relief Aid to Zaire

WASHINGTON — Zairian troops beat and looted Rwandan refugees last week in calculated acts of evil, making clear to all that Marshal Mobutu Sese Seko is his brother's keeper only if there is something in it for him.

Marshal Mobutu's troops acted to force the refugees out of Zaire or, preferably, to extort greater amounts of booty from the international community for allowing the Rwandans to stay on in conditions of inhuman squalor and danger.

However venal their motives and brutal their methods, the Zairian troops produced a useful side effect: They briefly shocked the rest of the world out of its comfortable indifference to the troublesome aftermath of Rwanda's genocidal war and to the zone of chaos inexorably spreading across the center of Africa.

The headlines and televised images of the strife around Goma, in eastern Zaire, naturally focused on the appalling plight of the tens of thousands of Rwandan refugees who were pushed across the border or fled into nearby forests as Marshal Mobutu's men burned one camp and assaulted its inhabitants.

The international community, in the form of the United Nations and the relief organizations working along Rwanda's borders, also focused on the immediate

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suffering. These organizations indicated they would provide enough tribute to the Zairians to maintain the ghastly status quo, at least until it suits Marshal Mobutu to get rid of his troublesome "guests."

But these reactions ignore the broader consequences of this African human and political tragedy, which calls into question the established ways in which the international community responds to human disaster. Our natural sympathy for abused refugees obscures an important reality: The Zairians are basically right about one thing (even though they act for the wrong reasons). Those refugees should not be where they are. They should not stay there. And the international community should not enable and encourage them to stay, as it has for a year.

Rwanda plunged into a genocidal civil war in 1994, with militias of the then-ruling Hutu tribe slaughtering at least 500,000 people, most of them from the Tutsi tribe. When the Tutsi-led Rwanda Patriotic Front guerrilla army overthrew the old government last summer, 1.2 million refugees, most of them Hutu and led by soldiers and militiamen guilty of the genocide, fled into Zaire and have refused to return.

"The refugee flows out of Rwanda were not the familiar unplanned flight of civilians caught up in a war, though that element did exist," according to a paper issued a few months after the outpouring by African Rights, a London-based human rights organization. "To a large extent they were the planned exodus of a population under the political direction of those responsible for the killing, to seek sanctuary abroad from where they could regroup and attack Rwanda again."

The disaster in Rwanda "is a political emergency par excellence. ... Human suffering was not an incidental byproduct of a political strategy." Suffering and death was the strategy itself, the paper concludes.

That has been true in Bosnia as well, where "ethnic cleansing" by Serbian forces has filled graveyards and refugee camps. But in both conflicts, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other UN agencies have insisted that the international community had to take a neutral position, in order to be able to help victims of all sides. Relief organizations such as Oxfam basically take that position.

That this "neutrality" has been abused in Zaire was made clear by a recent report of Human Rights Watch condemning the governments of France, Zaire and South Africa for allegedly rearming Hutu forces

based in the refugee camps. Zairian troops have routinely skimmed relief supplies intended for the camps, but now they apparently want a bigger payoff.

Instead of paying up, the UN and relief organizations should close the camps and force the Hutu to return to Rwanda, where the Patriotic Front government has restored order. The new government would almost certainly seek to punish the perpetrators of genocide, but it seems ready to reabsorb innocent civilians.

It would also preempt new chances for Marshal Mobutu, once a favorite of American presidents and diplomats, to blackmail the United Nations as he so long blackmailed the United States. His enormous greed grows even as all pretense that Zaire has a functioning government collapses.

By refusing to take sides between those who commit genocide and their victims, the United Nations invites the contempt that Marshal Mobutu displayed last week for its rules and existence.

African nations were created politically out of the best impulses the world organization had to offer during the era of decolonization. If they behave in this fashion, and get away with it, the rest of the world will not long respect or support the United Nations.

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