

Tutsi and Hutu test world's stomach again

As the traumatised citizens of Rwanda and Burundi remember the downing a year ago of a jet carrying their presidents – the event that triggered genocide in the former and brought its neighbour a step closer to civil war – nerves are stretched to breaking point.

In Kigali, the Rwandan capital, where the Tutsi-dominated government plans to put on trial today the first of 30,000 detainees suspected of murder and other crimes, the army is on the alert. Fearing a symbolically-timed raid by exiled Hutu militiamen operating from bases in Zaire, they have tightened security at checkpoints into the city. The run-up to the anniversary has seen a surge in arrests, with the already dangerously overcrowded prisons taking in an extra 1,500 detainees each week.

In Bujumbura, Burundi's capital, the fragile coalition of Hutus and Tutsis is struggling to rein in the panic spreading among both its own population and 200,000 Rwandan refugees camped in the north. As reports of civilian massacres by the Tutsi-dominated army and Tutsi extremists emerge, 55,000 Hutu refugees are clamouring for entry into Tanzania,

A year on and there is more blood in the air, writes **Michela Wrong**

which has slammed its frontier shut.

One year after that still mysterious rocket attack at Kigali airport, trust between communities in both countries has deteriorated, and further bloodshed becomes more likely.

"There is an enormous atmosphere of fear, dread and suspicion which affects almost everyone: fear of attack by extremists, fear of government reprisals for those attacks, fear of one man for his neighbour," says an aid worker.

With 2.2m Hutu refugees still stubbornly camped in Zaire, Uganda and Tanzania, talk of "national reconciliation" in Rwanda has an increasingly hollow ring. But some kind of return is becoming inevitable. Aid organisations, their supplies hit by western "donor fatigue", have cut rations to the camps. Fuel and water will soon start running out in Zaire's Kivu province and Tanzania, fast being stripped of its woodland.

But with each passing day a return becomes more problematic as Tutsi "fifty-niners" – long-term exiles who flooded back after the Hutu govern-

ment fled – put down roots on the land and in abandoned houses.

Mr Paul Kagame, the defence minister is haunted by a different kind of homecoming; that of 40,000 exiled Hutu fighters, rearming in preparation for an invasion. The ever-present threat has made a return to civilian life impossible.

For months now all eyes have been on Burundi, where a rise in killings by extremist militias from both sides and the increasing polarisation of the Hutu and Tutsi communities has prompted repeated predictions that the country is about to go the same way as Rwanda.

The comparison is rejected by those on the ground. "The vital difference is that in Rwanda you had an extremist party in power long enough to prepare and carry out a plan to wipe out the opposition," says Don Redding, spokesman for Save the Children Fund. "In Burundi the extremists are gaining strength but they are not in power, they are destabilising moderates in govern-

ment who are clinging to the institutional safeguards that remain."

Diplomats and aid workers say Burundi is approaching breaking point, with the government no longer really in control of what happens outside the capital. But many believe the international community can still help pull the country back from the brink.

Mr Redding believes it is vital for western diplomats, UN representatives and foreign aid workers based there to stay put, mediating between the two sides, supporting the institutions and publicising atrocities, if the serious trouble starts.

"When the UN rushed out of Rwanda as soon as the massacres began, it gave out precisely the wrong signal – the message was that this was Africans killing Africans and the west was going to stay out of it. It was the go-ahead to what followed."

Increasingly, observers are calling for a regional approach to the problems, which now spill across at least five countries, rather than the piecemeal efforts so far. But that



involves a bevy of African leaders burying personal ambitions and long-standing rivalries for the greater good.

For human rights groups, chafing at the slow pace set by Rwanda's international war crimes tribunal, there can be no solution to the region's problems until those responsible for the atrocities are

brought to book.

Ms Alison Desforges, of Human Rights Watch-Africa, believes reconciliation is impossible until there has been a clear delineation of guilt. Failing to punish the killers is a way of legitimising the deliberate stirring up of ethnic hatred as a political weapon.

"In a region this unstable we must put a stop to the use of slaughter as a means of taking political power. What happens over the next 10 years depends on how serious the international community is about delivering justice."

The issue stretches beyond Rwanda and Burundi – it applies to the many other African governments playing the tribal card. In a report issued to coincide with the April 6 anniversary, Human Rights Watch argues that it is time the international community stopped allowing itself to be lulled into inaction by the line that such bloodshed is the result of ancient ethnic animosities.

The world, it says, must learn to recognise how governments foment, manipulate and direct communal tensions to political ends, and start holding those using such methods to account.