



Report on events in Kibeho camp, april 1995

MSF

1995, may 16

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Report on
EVENTS IN KIBEHO CAMP, APRIL 1995

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EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE MASSACRE

In August 1994 an estimated 380,000 internally displaced persons (IDP's) lived in 37 camps in southwest Rwanda. In April 1995 this number had gone down to 250,000 people who were living in mainly nine big camps and a few smaller ones.

Under the auspices of the UN about 75,000 of the 380,000 displaced have been transported back to their communes (Operation Homeward and Operation Retour). Exact figures about displaced who returned on their own are not known.

The IDP camps in the former 'Zone Turquoise', the French protection zone in southwest Rwanda, had since the beginning of their existence been the centre of violent incidents between IDP's and the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA). As a result of these incidents a total of 34 displaced died between November 1994 and April 1995, amongst whom women and children.

The Rwandan government had always maintained that the camps harboured members of the Hutu militia, the killers responsible for the genocide. As these militia were suspected to make preparations for a renewed attack on the Rwandan Tutsi, like in the refugee camps in neighboring Zaire, the Rwandan government planned the closure of the camps.

As a first step to end the violence UNAMIR and the RPA entered all the shelters in Kibeho and N'dago camp in December 1994 in search of grenades and weapons. This two days operation resulted in the confiscation of about 1,000 machetes and knives, and the arrest of 43 displaced.

In the first months of 1995 an agreement had been reached between the Rwandan government and the U.N. peace-keeping force (UNAMIR) to empty the southern IDP camps without violence. The planned cooperation between Rwandan Ministries, UNAMIR, UN Agencies, International Organizations (IO's) and Non Governmental Organizations (NGO's) had been laid down in a document called "Strategy for the Southern IDP Camps -15 March 1995".

The camps were supposed to be emptied in phases in an orderly and peaceful manner from 15 April onwards.

MSF was present in the camps since August 94. It had at the moment of the events 15 expatriates running the Kibeho hospital. This report has been drafted in order to make the MSF testimony available to the independent inquiry commission and to the Rwandese government.

Methodology

This report is based on eyewitness accounts of MSF expatriate staff working in the camp of Kibeho and the Butare hospital at the time of the killings in Kibeho. As annexes to this report are added two direct eyewitness accounts written by MSF staff, in French.

Note concerning Unamir

We remind that according to their mandate as set out in the Security Council Resolution 925, they have the obligation to "contribute to the security and protection of displaced persons, refugees and civilians at risk in Rwanda' and to "take action in self-defence against persons or groups who threaten protected sites and populations".

The following is based on eyewitness accounts of expatriate MSF staff working in the southern IDP camps

18-22 APRIL 1995: DENIAL OF ACCESS FOR THE IDP'S TO WATER, FOOD, SHELTER, SANITARY FACILITIES AND MEDICAL CARE

In the night of 17-18 April 1995, contrary to the agreements made between the Rwandan government and UNAMIR, an estimated 2,500 RPA military entered and emptied the camps of Kibeho, N'dago and Munini.

In Kibeho camp more than 100,000 IDP's were living. The military chased the displaced out of their shelters while pulling away the plastic sheeting.

In the initial panic and chaos ten people (nine children and one woman) died of trampling and suffocation, and more than 100 people got wounded.

The displaced were forcibly regrouped on the hill in the centre of the camp, around the UNAMIR compounds. Here they have been standing squeezed together from the morning of Tuesday 18th till Saturday afternoon. They stood in the open air, with hardly any access to water and food. Most of them had had no time to take their belongings during the nightly expulsion from their huts.

During the night or early morning of 19/20 April the crowd had apparently been driven together even more tightly. The terrain next to the first UNAMIR compound where on Wednesday still many people had been standing, was on Thursday morning just covered with belongings left behind.

During these four and a half days the RPA did not permit the people to use the sanitary facilities that were present a few hundred meters away, so they had to do their needs on the spot. As they stood shoulder to shoulder and moving around was virtually impossible, they had very limited access to the medical facilities in the camp, run by MSF and Caritas.

MSF staff, part of the team of 15 MSF expats present that day in Kibeho camp, said:

"The crowd was very quiet and disciplined, which was the more remarkable under the extreme harsh conditions in which they found themselves. We regularly walked through the crowd but noticed no sign of aggression or unrest. The people just complained about having no water or food. I saw lots of pregnant women and small children sitting in puddles of dirty water and shit."

Friday 21 April: Quick deterioration of the health situation

On Friday morning several cases of dysentery were brought to the hospital. All the preconditions for cholera were there: The extreme heaping up of people, people consuming the scarce food and water in the same place as where they were doing their needs, decreased immunity, and on top of that heavy rains on Thursday afternoon and during the following night.

MSP alerted UNAMIR and all the UN and international agencies working in the area about the imminent risk of outbreaks of dysentery and cholera. In vain, as the day before, MSF tried to contact the RPA Commander in the camp but nobody seemed to know where he was. Usually, before the crisis, contacts were established easily, as all camp actors knew each other from regular security meetings.

MSF was concerned that these epidemics would not only affect the camp population, but also the neighbouring communes, as every day some thousands of people left the camps in IOM-trucks or on foot.

At 12.00 hrs. on Friday the Special Representative for the Secretary General of the UN in Rwanda, Mr Shaharyar Khan arrived by helicopter to the camp. Briefed already that morning by NGOs, UN- and international organizations during a meeting in Butare about the health hazards, and after a short discussion with MSF-staff in the camp he tried to meet the RPA Commanders, to propose them to reopen the facilities in the camp while waiting for the complete transferral of all the displaced. Epidemics could still easily be prevented by dispersing the people in smaller groups, giving them a medical screening and sufficient water and food.

After 15 minutes in which no RPA-responsible showed up, the UN special Representative left again.

Later that day the Ministry of Rehabilitation officially refused the request of the UN. Mr. Khan then declared that the solution would be to increase the solution of trucks and accelerate the departure process.

From 18 to 22 April: Deterioration of access for MSF

From the moment of eviction it was out of the question that displaced still had full access to the MSF facilities or that MSF still had full access to the people who needed medical assistance. The mass concentration of displaced made this impossible.

Besides this it became increasingly difficult for the MSF-team to continue their work in the hospital as before. Every day they were stopped at RPA-checkpoints and had to negotiate their access over and over again, up to one hour sometimes. MSF was usually told that the reason to be stopped was an order from a higher up person, who happened to be absent at that moment.

We radioed the Australians for an escort for our evacuation. Actually they had before agreed that they would stay around the hospital to protect us. However this did not work out, so when the shooting started we found ourselves alone with the wounded and dead, together with our local personnel which had continued working till then. At 12.10 hrs. it started to rain, and about five minutes later we were evacuated in three groups by the Australians into the UNAMIR compound at the entrance."

Shooting continued till 13.30 hrs. An MSF-nurse:

"For one and a half hour we could do nothing, just sat there. We saw RPA soldiers walking in and out the UNAMIR compound, and asked several UNAMIR soldiers why this was the case. They responded: "The RPA is finishing the job with their countrymen".

When the shooting subsided I went out. I saw how an RPA soldier chased a displaced fleeing in the valley and shoot him dead."

An MSF-doctor reported:

"Sometimes there were shots even inside the UNAMIR-compound. Meanwhile we treated about ten people, all of them wounded by bullets.

When the shooting was less intense I had a small discussion with some of the displaced nearby the UNAMIR-compound, in the company of a Zambian UNAMIR soldier who translated into Swahili. I asked the displaced if they knew how it had happened that people were wounded by machete. They answered me that during the night the soldiers had been shooting and had forced displaced to wound and kill other displaced by machete, threatening them that they would be shot themselves if they would not obey".

When the shooting subsided MSF was asked by UN-personnel to give medical assistance in both UNAMIR compounds. UNAMIR would bring in the wounded and provide escort.

"On our way to the second UNAMIR compound we had to pass through the crowd, who was standing quietly, terrorized. At a certain point there was no other way for us to get to the compound then to walk over a whole lane of dead and dying bodies, men, women and children, piled up 3 deep. They covered an area of about 25 by 3 meters."

The third period: 15.45-18.00 hrs.

"At 15.40 hrs. we saw a lot of RPA marching down towards the crowd standing next to the first UNAMIR compound, and starting to push the crowd towards the way out to Butare. Many people fled in panic inside the UNAMIR compound. RPA soldiers came in, and were on the verge of shooting them. UNAMIR soldiers intervened, put themselves between the RPA and displaced, and started to push the displaced out of the building. It happened in a rough way, some displaced were beaten up by UNAMIR soldiers.

At the same time very heavy shooting started right outside the compound. All people were driven towards the way out. From then till 18.00 hrs. there has been continuous machine-gun shooting and other heavy firing. "

"In the first compound we treated about 10 wounded people, who immediately afterwards were put outside again by UNAMIR. I treated a man whose intestines were all hanging out, which could be caused only by bullets."

"During the heavy shooting a UNAMIR soldier came in and told us: "All of you, come out and take a picture if you want from all these people running while they are being shot at."

From 14.00 hrs. onwards in the second compound UNAMIR brought in about thirty patients who got treated by the medical staff. But except for a few people who just could not move any more, UNAMIR put back all the wounded into the crowd after treatment.

One RPA-soldier with a head wound was brought in, still with his gun, and treated by the international medics. The wound was not caused by a bullet. MSF did not see or hear of any other injured or dead RPA-military. After he was treated the RPA-soldier left the compound again.

At 15.45 hrs. shooting started again.

"This time there was permanent machine-gun fire, combined with heavier weapons. The permanent machine-gun firing was right outside the second UNAMIR compound where we found ourselves. One of the UNAMIR soldiers coming back into the compound commented: "They are spraying them". The soldiers were shooting directly into the crowd who fled in panic, inevitably trampling everybody who fell down. After one hour nothing was seen anymore of the masses that had been standing there the preceding days. The whole area was just covered with thousands of bodies. "

When the firing subsided a bit UNAMIR and international workers started to take out babies who were still alive, laying between the corpses, and brought them into the compound. RPA-soldiers were seen walking through the bodies and looting what they found.

After the fifth attempt to leave the place the MSF team was finally evacuated towards 18.00 hrs. They left the camp escorted by UNAMIR. On our way out people (wounded and not-wounded) asked for help. Continuous firing was still heard from the hills.

23 APRIL TILL TODAY: CONTINUED LACK OF PROTECTION AND LACK OF ACCESS TO BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS

Kibeho camp: Towards total denial of access for MSF

On Sunday 23 April MSF went again to Kibeho camp. RPA soldiers were all over the place. They stopped MSF on their way to the second UNAMIR compound, and equally forbid them to enter the hospital. MSF was told that the building next to the hospital was occupied by Interahamwe snipers.

On Sunday in Kibeho camp MSF and other medical NGO-workers could not get any further than outside the first UNAMIR compound. Here the Australian UNAMIR medical people, assisted by MSF workers, treated about ninety wounded people, who were then transferred to the MSF hospital in Butare. The lesser injured people were sent out of the hospital. MSF got authorisation to transport some children and injured from the Kibeho hospital to the MSF hospital in Butare

On Sunday morning at the first compound Australian UNAMIR soldiers were continuously carrying away dead bodies into a mass grave.

Exchange of fire, legitimate defence?

Sunday mid-day the Ministers of Justice and Interior, and the Head of the UN Human Rights Mission visited the camp. When the question came up whether or not there had been an exchange of fire between the RPA and displaced, MSF informed them that their team had not heard or seen any exchange of fire on Saturday. They could just report that the crowd had been extremely quiet and disciplined during all the preceding four and a half days, and that MSF staff had never seen any guns neither any sign of aggression.

Sporadic shooting continued during the whole afternoon. Late in the afternoon when MSF was leaving Rwanda's President Pasteur Bizimungu also visited the camp. At the checkpoint we saw a group of 60 male IDP' s trying to leave the camp, being stopped by the RPA.

On Monday 24 MSF went again to Kibeho in order to find out if more wounded people were still around, but was totally denied access. The RPA did not allow MSF to pass the last checkpoint, 'thereby preventing MSP from giving medical assistance to those wounded who were still in the camp. But they did let in ICRC and journalists.

That day the RPA threatened to blow up the building where the alleged snipers were hiding. MSF immediately alerted Special UN Representative Khan, embassies and international agencies. The deadline for the blowing up was changed several times on Monday. Finally the building was not blown up.

Tuesday 25 April UNAMIR dissuaded MSF from going to the camp. It was known that there were still about 1,000-2,000 people in the building next to the hospital, including many women and children, and possibly wounded people. All of them refused to leave the place.

Wednesday 26 MSF tried again to enter the camp. When this was permitted they tried to discuss with the RPA to get access into the building and to give the people inside a medical check. The request was refused.

ICRC did get access to the people, but they stuck to their refusal to come out.

For Thursday 27 April the President of Rwanda had invited UN Special Representative Mr. Khan, all the accredited ambassadors, UNAMIR, UN- and international agencies, NGOs and journalists to go to Kibeho camp. In the company of the President Pasteur Bizimungu, Vice President General Paul Kagame and most of Rwanda's ministers a visit was paid to the camp.

MSF went to the camp but stayed outside, as a protest. The President gave a speech, indicating that the RPA had been provoked by the Interahamwe. Vice President General Kagame recognised that errors had been committed by soldiers, and announced that measures would be taken against them.

Number of deads:

The President accused the international community of giving false numbers of the Kibeho dead, up to 10, 000. He announced the creation of an international enquiry commission to investigate the Kibeho events.

That afternoon several mass graves were opened again: a total of 338 bodies were dug up. This was going to be the official figure of the Rwandan government.

During the digging up the ambassadors and journalists tried to persuade the displaced still hiding in the building next to the hospital to come out. Some individuals did indeed come, and were escorted by UNAMIR to their home communes. But all the others refused to go.