

# First Christmas since the killings

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KIGALI, Dec 25 (AFP) - The churches were full for Christmas Mass, and parties were laid on for the thousands of orphans, but the Rwandan capital could not easily forget the wounds left by this year's tribal bloodletting.

It was the first Christmas here since President Juvenal Habyarimana's death in a mysterious plane crash in April unleashed widespread massacres among the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi.

In a moving service in Holy Family church, youngsters performed graceful religious dances. The church is where thousands of Tutsi and liberal Hutu found refuge between April and June. They lived in constant fear of being tracked down like animals by the extremist Hutu militia called interahamwe, who used to come hunting for prey to execute.

Midnight Mass on Saturday was said in fact at 5 or 6 p.m. That has been the practice since 1990, for security reasons. There is still a lack

of trust in the city, where former rebels of the Tutsi-dominated Patriotic Front roam the streets. They drove out the Hutu-led government in July.

Saint Michael's church echoed to songs of peace and love. A stubborn Frenchman named Marc Vaiter looked after orphans in the grounds there, refusing to abandon them in the months of dread as the militia kept loping around. Their Christmas treat was a visit to the French cultural centre for a Graeme Allwright concert.

Their were parties and entertainments elsewhere in the country for the orphans and unaccompanied children who have survived years of civil war and this year's genocide, which is estimated to have cost between half a million and one million lives.

The rehabilitation ministry says there are 150,000 such children. UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund, says there are 70,000 inside Rwanda and 45,000 in refugee camps in neighbouring states.

"There is no joy, " remarked Father Blanchard, another "hero" of the grim tragedy. He acknowledged that the Catholic Church had been heavily criticised, and said it needed to "get a grip on itself".

The only people who seem to have passed an "ordinary" Christmas are the Tutsi who have returned from exile in Zaire, Burundi and Uganda following the Patriotic Front's victory. There are said to be almost 600,000 of them.

"They just don't seem to realise," Blanchard said, shaking his head. They have taken over whole districts of Kigali. For many of the city's native residents, including liberal Hutu who back the Front's rebellion, the returning Tutsi seem to be the only people to have gained. There is much bitterness among those who stayed put and face enormous financial hardship.

"Only the 'Burundians' have enough money to celebrate Christmas," they grumble, nicknaming the newcomers after neighbouring Burundi.

The Hutu community is full of rumours about people disappearing as soldiers of the Front come and arrest them. In the capital's overcrowded prison, many detainees say they were picked up solely because they wanted to regain possession of their homes from the "Burundians".

The problem sparked off a serious crisis in the national unity government set up by the Front. General Paul Kagame, vice-president and defence minister, defended his troops against criticism of their behaviour from Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu, a Hutu who is not a member of the Front.

There is a threat from the soldiers of the ousted army and assorted militia in refuge in Zaire, and a risk of Tutsi extremism fuelled by those coming back from Burundi, where the same two tribes have been fighting for the past week. Little wonder that Christmas here could not really be joyful or serene.

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