

Kabila's forces massacred 2,000 civilians in July, group says

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KINSHASA, Sept 5 (AFP) - Around 2,000 civilians were massacred in July in the former Zaire when Laurent Kabila's rebel forces used Rwandan troops to avenge attacks by Mai-Mai guerrillas, a human rights group said Friday.

The Mai-Mai had killed 162 rebels in the area of Masisi after Kabila's rebels forced a traditional chief and his aides in South Kivu to transport their belongings, the Association for the Defense of Human Rights said.

A group of Mai-Mai decided to "wipe away the insult to their chief" by attacking rebel positions, it added. Some 162 Kabila forces were killed around the areas of Nyabibwe and Minova in the area of Masisi.

With reinforcements from neighboring Rwanda, ADFLC soldiers carried out reprisals with the encouragement from local authorities, the group said.

Rwandan troops in helicopters

torched around 50 villages, destroying houses, public buildings as well as Masisi hospital, the group said in a statement received in Kinshasa.

The human rights group quoted peasants as saying these reprisals left more than 2,000 civilians dead.

Providing more details about the fighting, the human rights group said Kabila's troops and Rwandan soldiers fought with Mai-Mai guerrillas from the Hunde, Nyanga, Tembo and Kumu ethnic groups backed by former Zairean and Rwandan troops.

The fighting took place in the north and south Kivu regions following the nomination of Tutsi dignitaries to local government posts, the association said in a statement sent to AFP in Kinshasa.

"The Mai-Mai guerrilla seem to have seen these nominations as an attempt to rob the traditional Hund and Nyanga chiefs of their authority," the human rights group said.

The human rights group said Kabila's new government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has just set up a commission of enquiry to end the political and ethnic troubles in the north and south Kivu.

The areas have been wracked for a long time by ethnic fighting between the inhabitants and Rwandan Hutu and Tutsi immigrants.

The trouble grew with the arrival of Rwandan refugees in 1994 and since Kabila's forces marched to power in May with the support of Rwandan Tutsi soldiers.

The human rights group said on-

ly a "political solution" can end the violence in north and south Kivu.

It called for an independent investigation tasked with consulting all parties to the conflict and proposing ways to settle issues of nationality, cohabitation of ethnic groups, as well as distributing land.

It also called for the creation of a national army so that Kabila's "stop giving the image of an armed occupation" as well as legal action against officers and soldiers implicated in the massacres of peasants.

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