

Chief of Rwandan Rebels Gives Hollow Democracy Pledge

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THE credibility of the Rwandan Patriotic Front as a guerrilla army is beyond doubt after a string of victories this month it looks set to overrun more numerous government forces but its political programme is far from clear.

Officially the policy of the RPF is to institute democracy after a transitional period which, it hopes, will follow its victory in the civil war that restarted last month.

In an interview with The Times, Alex Kanyarengwe, the chairman of the movement, said : "Democracy is a state of respect for the opinions of others." Sitting in a wicker chair outside a bungalow with every window missing as the smell of rotting bodies from government-inspired massacres wafted through the warm air of Nyamata, he added : "There must be democracy of ideas before democracy for the masses."

His half-hearted commitment

to democracy indicated what most members of the RPF clearly feel, but few will articulate that it will be many, many years before they entrust the country to the Hutu majority responsible for murdering tens of thousands of Tutsi and opposition supporters.

The chairman insisted that it would be impossible to bring every murderer to trial because "that would mean going after the whole country". Dwarfed by his tall Tutsi bodyguards, Mr Kanyarengwe a Hutu, as are between 30 and 40% of the movement's fighters did his best to argue that his was not a tribal organisation.

He also insisted that Rwanda's civil war was not a tribal issue. It was true, Mr Kanyarengwe admitted, that the vast majority of the victims had been Tutsi, but he said they had been slaughtered along with many Hutu supporters of opposition parties.

About half of the million Tutsi

in Rwanda are believed to have been killed since April 6. But many remain in pockets around the country where, in towns such as Kabgayi and Cyangugu on the border with Zaire, they are dragged from concentration camps and murdered. With every rebel success does the RPF not put these remaining people at risk of outright massacre? "Are there camps of Tutsi? I do not know where they are. There are many refugees throughout the country and we are concerned for the safety of them all," he said.

The admission that he had no idea about the large numbers of Tutsi 40,000 in Kabgayi alone still at risk was in sharp contrast with military officers, who seek news of where such camps are, and how many people are in them. His ignorance is, however, also a reflection of the *sang froid* with which the RPF has greeted the massacres of the Tutsi, who dominate their own movement.

Although Paul Kagame, the military leader of the RPF, has refused to talk about a ceasefire with the rump government of Rwanda, whom he has described as a "clique of murderers", many of the soldiers in the field, who were born and educated in Uganda,

appear largely unmoved by the mass killings. "That is war," is their usual comment.

Mr Kanyarengwe might be dismissed as the "token Hutu" in the RPF, which was formed in Uganda by ethnic Rwandan officers from President Museveni's National Resistance Army and invaded Rwanda in 1990. But his background indicates that he should be a significant force in the country when, and if, the rebels take power.

He rose to prominence in the Cabinet of President Habyarimana, killed in a plane crash last month, as the Minister of the Interior between 1973 and 1980. He had earlier served five years as head of the intelligence services, but was forced into exile after he was implicated in a coup attempt.

"We will negotiate only with the army never with the illegal government of criminals," Mr Kanyarengwe said. "There will be no ceasefire until they stop the massacres." The government says that it will not stop the killing until the rebels stop the shooting.

From Sam Kiley in Nyamata, southern Rwanda.