

No hard feelings

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Villagers Defend Motives for Massacres

MUSHA, Rwanda (AP) — Juliana Mukankwaya is the mother of six children and the murderer of two, the son and daughter of people she knew since she herself was a child.

Last week, Mukankwaya said, she and other women rounded up the children of fellow villagers they perceived as enemies. With gruesome resolve, she said, they bludgeoned the stunned youngsters to death with large sticks.

"They didn't cry because they knew us," said the woman. "They just made big eyes. We killed too many to count."

Wearing a black shawl and a blank expression, the slightly built 35-year-old said she was doing the children a favor, since they were now orphans who faced a hard life. Their fathers had been butchered with machetes and their mothers had been taken away to be raped and killed, she said.

Mukankwaya is a member of the Interahamwe, the name for the innumerable Hutu tribal militias that have been blamed for slaughtering an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 people since April 6, when a mysterious plane crash killed the Hutu presidents of Rwanda and neighboring Burundi.

Most of the victims have been members of the minority Tutsi tribe and Hutus perceived as opponents of the government.

Mukankwaya was among 30 peasants from around Kigali, the capital, rounded up in recent days by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, the Tutsi-dominated rebel army that has captured large chunks of the country since the carnage began.

The people are being held in a former village community center at a small rebel base in Musha, 20 miles northeast of Kigali, the site of fierce artillery battles between the rebels and the government army backed by the Hutu militias.

The rebel commander of this stra-

tegic outpost north of Kigali agreed to let The Associated Press interview the militia members. All appeared healthy and there was no evidence of mistreatment.

Lt. Vincent Anyakarundi, a rebel officer, said the captives were being "re-educated" rather than punished because they were exhorted and coerced into killing their neighbors. The instigators, he said, were the government, local officials and army soldiers, who the prisoners said supplied them with weapons ranging from clubs to grenades.

"They are peasants" he said. "They are just puppets of the government."

In areas where rebels have seized control, they have appointed political officers to urge people not to listen to exhortations of violence against Tutsis or Hutu foes of the government. The "re-educators" have been preaching national unity and the official party line is no reprisals, no revenge and no punishment.

"People who would carry out such massacres, especially against children, are less than animals," said Tito Rutaremara, 49, a former party coordinator and leading political influence in the rebel movement. "You have to teach people to forgive and forget. It's like the Nazis. Most people were behind the Nazis, but you can't punish all the people."

Although individual acts of re-

venge likely have taken place, there have been no independently confirmed instances of mass reprisals.

In Mushya, captives gave detailed accounts of the horrors they helped to carry out in their villages, when one part of the community suddenly rose up and destroyed another part.

Virtually all of the prisoners recounted their horrific deeds in dull, emotionless voices, their faces a collection of impassive masks.

Mukankwaya blithely mentioned the names of the parents of the two children she killed during the killing spree that she said left hundreds dead in her village of Nyatovu, just north of Kigali.

Potato and sorghum farmer Alfred Kirukura, 29, said he joined in the murderous orgy in his village of Muhazi, 30 miles north of Kigali, on May 9. He said he took a machete to three childhood pals - one a Tutsi and the others Hutus branded by the locals as anti-government agitators.

As he killed them, "They said, 'We are friends! We shared the same classroom!'" he said.

Maria-Devota Mukazitoni, 24, said she didn't kill anybody in her village of Rutonde, just north of Kigali, but organized the looting of homes after hundreds of people in her town were massacred.

Sixteen-year-old Kitazigurwa - who said he had no first name - said his job was to spy on people saying

bad things about the government. People he named were killed.

Joseph Rukwavu, 74, said he was too old to kill anybody but acted as the key authority in his village of Mwuma on people who claimed to be Hutu but whose parents or grandparents were, in fact, Tutsi.

"Two hundred were killed in my sector, even my wife, because she would not join Interahamwe," he said in a dull monotone, his face unmoving even as he mentioned his wife's death.

"The militia gathered everybody up near a big hole," he said. "They were weeping, even the men. Even the week before we killed them they were weeping in fear."

He said the army supplied the villagers with the necessary killing tools and oversaw the slaughter.

"They (the victims) said, 'Oh, we are the same people, we are your neighbors. Instead of hiding us you are killing us.'"

Boniface Gasana, 52, said he invited 15 people on the local hit list into his home on the pretense of hiding them, then tipped the village killers of their whereabouts when the massacre began. A woman near him shouted that he also took part.

Even as they spoke, the evening air brought the stench of rotting corpses from the gentle hills around Musha, a common odor throughout the country.

At Kiramuruz, 60 miles northeast of Kigali, 20 bodies lay in a neat row in the woods just outside the seemingly sedate and bustling village.

Resident Vitali Rudasingwa said the people were killed by Hutu militias two weeks ago, even though rebels were in control of the town.

"These militias are still killing people," he said. "But now they are hiding in the corners."

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