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TO: ANNAN/GOULDING/HANSEN/AIME, UNATIONS, NEW YORK
INFO: KITTANI/GHAREKHAN, UNATIONS, NEW YORK
FROM: SHAHARYAR M. KHAN, UNAMIR, KIGALI
DATE: 24 APRIL 1995
NO.: MIR
SUBJECT: THE KIBEHO DISASTER
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1. In response to the request in your code cable no. 1292, of 23 April, I am forwarding below a report and assessment of the recent Kibeho disaster.

2. The background

Last December 28, UNAMIR and the agencies, in cooperation with the Rwandese Government, launched Opération Retour to encourage and expedite the voluntary return home of displaced persons estimated then at about 300,000 in several IDP camps in southwestern Rwanda. By the time Opération Retour ground to a halt in early February following the RPA attack at the Busanze IDP camp during which about twelve displaced persons were killed, about 40,000 IDPs had voluntarily returned to their home communes. Since then, UNAMIR, the Agencies and the Rwandese Government, operating jointly in the Integrated Operation Centre (IOC), had attempted to formulate an agreed action plan to persuade the estimated 250,000 IDPs remaining in the camps to return home voluntarily. Kibeho, with over 100,000 IDPs, was the largest camp, followed by Ndaga (40,000), Kamana (25,000) and Munini (15,000).

3. It has long been evident that the RPA was anxious to close down these IDP camps as it regarded them as hot-beds of armed opposition and de-stabilization. The Government was also anxious to have the camps vacated to assume full sovereignty over its national territory.

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4. In order to reign in attempts by RPA to close down the camps forcibly, the IOC prepared a joint paper in favour of a voluntary process in which the following broad elements were discussed:

- (a) An intensive information campaign would be mounted to assure IDPs that their rights would be protected and they would be treated fairly upon their voluntary return. These assurances were to be given at a high level.
- (b) Conditions would be prepared in the communes to receive the returning IDPs. This would require humanitarian assistance, housing and administrative arrangements. The United Nations had earmarked part of its Trust Fund resources for this purpose.
- (c) An operation would be launched to arrest the alleged criminals who were expected to be found in fairly large numbers in the camps.

5. While items (a) & (b) had been discussed in detail and agreed in principle, modalities of (c) were not finalized. Nor was the date for the launching of the operation agreed. Moreover, the Rwandese Government's formal approval for the IOC's plan of action had not been given. I had, in my meeting with Rwandese leaders strongly urged the Government to accord its approval to the proposal so that a joint, well co-ordinated operation could be launched in a proper manner. No such approval was forthcoming. Instead, on Tuesday 18 April, the RPA launched an operation, without prior consultation with us and it appears not even with its own civilian agencies, to close the IDP camps.

The developments

6. On 16 April before dawn, the RPA surrounded the 4 larger camps, namely Kibeho (100,000), Ndaga (45,000), Kamana (25,000) and Munini (15,000). They fired shots in the air and called on the IDPs to gather in a central area. By far the most critical site was Kibeho with the largest population of IDPs who were huddled into a small area. The RPA then sought UN assistance to transport these people to their communes. These developments were reported in my code cable no. 1379 dated 20 April and for the sake of brevity I shall not repeat them in this report.

7. By Friday 21 April, there were danger signals appearing that the situation could degenerate into a wider crisis. These were discussed with the Vice-President (my code cable no. 1415 refers) and could be summarized as follows:

- (a) There was danger of cholera in Kibeho. The Government therefore needed to permit more people to walk-home (rather than wait for vehicles which were hampered by rains and muddy roads to reach the camp) in order to relieve pressure.

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- (b) The Government should allow cooked food in the camps and the distribution of water.
- (c) Security should be provided in the communes for returning IDPs.
- (d) Permission should be granted for agency representatives to enter the camps.

8. Despite our reservations to the manner in which the camps were being closed and due to the fact that we were faced with a massive humanitarian problem, UNAMIR and the UN Agencies decided to help alleviate the problem by providing humanitarian aid to the IDPs and placing over 80 vehicles at the disposal of the Government to transport IDPs back to their communes.

9. On Saturday 22 April, I telephoned Gen. Kagame at 9 am to inform him that the situation in Kibeho was desperate and that action to ease the pressure needed to be taken. He agreed with my recommendations and sent his Chief of Staff to my office at 12 noon. Gen. Tousignant and I jointly met the Chief of Staff and we agreed to take steps to ease tension (based on para. 7 (a)-(d) above). Regrettably, while we were discussing the issue, the first attempt by IDPs to break-out of the RPA cordon was taking place in Kibeho. In a sense, remedial measures were already too late. Thereafter, as the crisis escalated, no member of the Government leadership was available.

10. The crisis took the following form:

- (a) At 11.30 am on Saturday, 22 April, there was an attempted break-out by a crowd of IDPs from the RPA cordon. While RPA fired to control it, similar break-outs were attempted in other sectors resulting in several breaches of the cordon through which a stampede began. This led to chaos in which thousands attempted to escape. RPA fired guns, machine guns and grenades to contain the mêlée. Lives were lost through the firing, some by the stampede. There was tension and pandemonium for about 3 hours after which relative calm was restored by 2 pm. The dead and wounded were attended by UNAMIR forces deployed in the Kibeho camp, i.e. Zambatt (2 companies) and Ausmed (1 company).
- (b) At 5 pm later on the same day, another surge took place in order to break-out of the cordon. This effort was more successful than the morning attempt with the result that thousands again began to flee. This time RPA's response was more ferocious and a large number were killed by firing. Some IDPs were bayoneted to death. Some soldiers lost their discipline and engaged in indiscriminate killing and looting.
- (c) As regards the Government's claim that its forces had been provoked, there have long been strong indications that the IDP camps in Kibeho, Ndaga, etc., had interahamwe desperadoes in them. The RPA subsequently claimed that their soldiers had been fired upon. This is possible as the hard-core

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interahamwe suspected of being in the camps were expected to have some arms. On two nights running before Saturday's crisis, these armed elements who are believed to be supporters of the former government forces, had intimidated the civilian IDP population by killing or wounding with machetes those who had shown a desire to leave. Some of these intimidators had been arrested by Zambatt.

- (d) By nightfall, Kibeho camp emptied on its own with the flight of the IDPs either towards Butare (20,000) or to their communes (where they have been given a hostile reception by the inhabitants) or towards the borders which have been closed. The majority would attempt to scatter and live off the land as best they can, including through banditry. Those that reach Butare and our overnight relief centres are being given humanitarian aid and transport to their communes. Initially (on Saturday 21 April) the estimated deaths were reckoned at over 4,000. The following day after FC Gen. Tousignant's visit to Kibeho and a carefully organized count on scientific lines, the estimate was reduced to 1,800-2,000.
- (e) About 2,000 IDPs, probably hard-core, militant elements, have remained in Kibeho, holed-up in the medical centre. They are likely to be armed. They refuse to leave despite threats by RPA to blow up the building. We are advising restraint and normal procedure of arrest.
- (f) Of the remaining camps, there has been an incident at Kamana in which 5 people were killed but otherwise developments there have been peaceful. Ndaga and Kamana remain cordoned off while Munini has seen a voluntary closure with the "walk-home" of the IDPs. We are pressing the Government for these two camps to be closed gradually in an orderly fashion.
- (g) A major humanitarian operation is being launched from Butare by UNAMIR in co-ordination with the UN agencies and NGOs.

Assessment

11. The following is my assessment:

- (a) The killing at Kibeho camp was due to insensitivity by the RPA towards the IDPs who had been huddled together in impossible conditions for 4 days. There was mismanagement and a lack of compassion which led to the crisis. However, I believe it was the RPA's intention to close the camps in an orderly way, but the operation went horribly wrong.
- (b) The fact that, at the outset, RPA were careful not to cause casualties and not to destroy tents and other IDP belongings showed that the intention was to close down camps as peacefully as possible. Of course, knowing that hard-core militia elements were in the camps, the RPA may have anticipated some

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violence and killing. Gen. Kagame's willingness to relieve pressure by accepting my suggestions as also his immediate decision to send his Chief of Staff to work out details also indicated a desire for the operation to be completed smoothly. Nevertheless, having anticipated the possibility of violence, the RPA should have been better prepared to contain it and prevent the killing of unarmed civilians, including women and children.

- (c) The killing of about 2,000 IDPs occurred when tension in Kibeho became unbearable due to: (i) the lack of food, shelter, sanitation and water for 3 days; (ii) the lack of space and the slow thinning out from the Kibeho camp; and (iii) the intimidation, especially at nights, when the hard-core intimidators murdered and wounded, with machetes, those who had decided to leave. Proof that it was the inhuman conditions at Kibeho which led to the bread-out and subsequent killings is available in the fact that in the other three camps, where conditions were not so desperate, there has been a relatively peaceful closure.
- (d) The IDP closure was the first important initiative that the Rwandese Government and its Army (RPA) took without consulting UNAMIR since the Government was installed last July. All other major initiatives (e.g. take over of Sector 4, Opération Retour, Opération Hope, new currency notes, etc.) were taken in consultation and in cooperation with UNAMIR. They were all carried out successfully. I am sure that if consultations had taken place for this operation, the disaster could have been avoided. Nevertheless, I regard the operation to have been derailed through lack of sensitivity to conditions in Kibeho and to mismanagement.
- (e) The reason for the non-consultation by RPA with UNAMIR is the recent smear campaign that has been pursued, with the Government's acquiescence, against UNAMIR. Clearly, the predominating hard-line attitude of extremists elements within the Government and RPA have precluded consultation and cooperation with UNAMIR.
- (f) Despite absence of consultation and our reservation at the abrupt decision to close the camps, we have committed all our available resources at alleviating the humanitarian problem facing us in the camps and now in Butare stadium. This includes:
 - (i) vehicles
 - (ii) humanitarian relief, including food, water, medicare
 - (iii) repair of roads to the camps
 - (iv) retention of Zambatt and Ausmed in Kibeho to look after the IDPs, especially the wounded, as well as children, many of whom are now unaccompanied.

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- (g) Even after the crisis on Saturday, we have worked round the clock to provide medicare, humanitarian assistance and vehicle/helicopter help for the injured and wounded. MILOBs have been sent to the communes to which IDPs are returning, so as to help create a climate of confidence and conditions of security for the returnees. We are in regular contact with the Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda with a view to finding effective ways and means of enhancing respect for the rights of all citizens, including IDPs and promoting security and confidence in the various communes and villages.
- (h) As regards the UN operation in Rwanda, we stand at the cross-roads. The Government can take this opportunity to reverse the tide of sponsored antagonism against us. Responsible Rwandese leaders, especially the President and the Vice-President, have expressed a desire to do so. Gen. Kagame specifically appreciated UNAMIR's role after RPA had moved into the camps. He agreed with the relief measures I had proposed. So, at the responsible level, there is recognition of our positive and constructive role. This crisis could therefore help bring us back to the path of cooperation. To do so would however require a clear lead from the top and throughout the State machinery. The leadership should not be saying positive things while the managers with whom we have to work on a daily basis are acting otherwise.
- (i) On the other hand, the crisis could send the Government in the other direction, pushing it to use UNAMIR as a scapegoat by criticizing it publicly for exacerbating the crisis. It could claim that UNAMIR forces did not cooperate, give negative advice to IDPs or exaggerated death-figures. I fear that this is the more likely trend.
- (j) In any event, UN would have to review its role in Rwanda in the coming weeks and would take into account the current context of the sovereign Government being incapable or unwilling to accept our advice and role as prescribed in our mandate. Are the resources (personnel and equipment) as well as the powers (Chapter VI of the Charter) given to UNAMIR adequate to cope with the challenges that remain, as illustrated by the Kibeho disaster? The mandate discussions should provide a particularly timely and appropriate opportunity for a full and detailed consideration of the Rwandese situation and of the role of the United Nations and the international community as a whole.