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U.N. Congo Report Offers New View on Genocide

By HOWARD W. FRENCH
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A forthcoming [United Nations](#) report on 10 years of extraordinary violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo bluntly challenges the conventional history of events there after the 1994 [Rwandan genocide](#), charging that invading troops from [Rwanda](#) and their rebel allies killed tens of thousands of members of the Hutu ethnic group, including many civilians.



Roger Lemoyne/Liaison, via Getty Images
Rwandan refugees passed a body in a refugee camp in Congo in 1997. United Nations-administered camps housed roughly one million Hutu who had fled the genocide in Rwanda.



Killings in Congo and Rwanda have led to long inquiries.

The 545-page report on 600 of the country's most serious reported atrocities raises the question of whether Rwanda could be found guilty of genocide against Hutu during the war in neighboring [Congo](#), but says international courts would need to rule on individual cases.

In 1994, more than 800,000 people, predominantly members of the ethnic Tutsi group in Rwanda, were slaughtered by the Hutu. When a Tutsi-led government seized power in Rwanda, Hutu militias fled along with Hutu civilians across the border to Congo, then known as Zaire. Rwanda invaded to pursue them, aided by a Congolese rebel force the report also implicates in the massacres.

While Rwanda and Congolese rebel forces have always claimed that they attacked Hutu militias who were sheltered among civilians, the United Nations report documents deliberate reprisal attacks on civilians.

The report says that the apparently systematic nature of the massacres "suggests that the numerous deaths cannot be attributed to the hazards of war or seen as equating to collateral damage." It continues, "The majority of the victims were children, women, elderly people and the sick, who were often undernourished and posed no threat to the attacking forces."

The existence of the United Nations document, titled Democratic Republic of Congo, 1993-2003, was first reported by the French daily newspaper Le Monde. But participants

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in the drafting of the report have described its progress and difficulties over a period of seven months to The New York Times, which obtained the most recent version of the report.

The Rwandan government responded angrily to the report, calling it “outrageous.” The topic is extremely delicate for the government, which has built its legitimacy on its history of combating the genocide in Rwanda. Political figures there have been accused of perpetuating a “genocide ideology” for making claims that are similar to the report’s.

“It is immoral and unacceptable that the United Nations, an organization that failed outright to prevent genocide in Rwanda and the subsequent refugees crisis that is the direct cause for so much suffering in Congo and Rwanda, now accuses the army that stopped the genocide of committing atrocities in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” said Ben Rutsinga of the Office of the Government Spokesperson.

The release of the report appears to have been delayed in part over fears of the reaction of the Rwandan government, which has long enjoyed strong diplomatic support from the United States and Britain. There is concern in the United Nations that Rwanda might end its participation in [peacekeeping](#) operations in retaliation for the report.

“No one was naïve enough to think that inspecting mass graves in which Rwandan troops were involved would make Kigali happy, but we have shared the draft with them,” said a senior official at the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, which oversaw the investigation. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because the findings had not been officially released.



He said: Voices have said, ‘Can’t we just delete the genocide references? Isn’t this going to cause a lot more difficulties in the region?’ But these voices have not carried the day.”

The United Nations document breaks the history of 10 years of violence in Congo into several periods. It begins with the final years of the three-decade rule of President [Mobutu Sese Seko](#), marked by attacks on a Tutsi minority in the country’s far east, and violent raids on Rwandan territory from United Nations-administered refugee camps that housed roughly a million Hutu who had fled Rwanda after the genocide. These raids were conducted by elements of the defeated Hutu national army, and the Hutu Interahamwe militia, both principally involved in the genocide in Rwanda.

The report also covers two other time periods: the Second Congolese War, from 1998 to 2001, when the armies of eight African states vied for control of the country, and 2001 to 2003, when foreign armies partially withdrew, leaving a tentative peace. Congo continues to suffer major atrocities, including the rape of thousands of women by armed groups.



The report contains a chilling, detailed accounting of the breakup of Hutu refugee camps in eastern Zaire at the start of the war in October 1996, followed by the pursuit of hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees across the country’s vast hinterland by teams of Rwandan soldiers and their Zairean rebel surrogates, the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo. Those forces were led by [Laurent Kabila](#), who took over as president the next year, and who was the father of Congo’s current president, [Joseph Kabila](#).

The report presents repeated examples of times when teams of Rwandan soldiers and



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their Congolese rebel allies lured Hutu refugees with promises they would be repatriated to Rwanda, only to massacre them.

In one such episode, advancing Congolese rebel fighters and Rwandan troops summoned refugees to a village center, telling them they would be treated to meat from a slaughtered cow to strengthen them for their trek back to Rwanda. As the Hutu began to register their names by prefecture of origin, a whistle sounded and soldiers opened fire on them, killing between 500 and 800 refugees, the report said.

In other instances, as survivors scrambled desperately through thick [rain forest](#) in a country as large as Western Europe, extermination teams laid ambush along strategic roadways and forest paths, making no distinction between men, women and children as they killed them.

Although the report does detail attacks when there were military targets, notably at Tingi Tingi, a Hutu camp in Maniema Province, such targets are extremely rare in the report.

An element of the report that could help determine any judgment of genocide concerns the treatment of native Congolese Hutu. The report suggests they were singled out for elimination along with Hutu refugees from Rwanda and Burundi. The report asserts that there was no effort to make a distinction between militia and civilians, noting a “tendency to put all Hutu people together and ‘tar them with the same brush.’ ”

Pascal Kambale, a prominent longtime Congolese human rights lawyer who was consulted by the United Nations investigators, said: “The ex-F.A.R. fighters were said to be hiding behind the refugee populations, but the truth is that the attackers were targeting both the Rwandan Hutus and the Congolese Hutus,” referring to the Hutu-led Rwandan militia, F.A.R. in its French initials. “Entire families were killed, whole villages were burned, and in my view this remains the most heinous crime that happened during these 10 years.”

Timothy Longman, the director of the African Studies Center at [Boston University](#), said that people in eastern Congo had long charged they were victims, too. “The reason it didn’t get more attention is that it contradicted the narrative of the Rwandan Popular Front as the ‘good group’ that stopped the genocide in Rwanda,” he said.

As early as 1997, the United Nations began investigations into reports of possible crimes against humanity involving extermination of Hutu populations by the Congolese rebel forces and their Rwandan backers, but Laurent Kabila, as president, refused access to areas where atrocities were believed to have been committed, and the investigation was abandoned. A senior United Nations official said that the investigation was given new life when three mass graves were discovered in North Kivu Province by United Nations workers in 2005.

“Yes, this is stupendously overdue,” the official said. “But Laurent Kabila had been killed, there was a peace process and a new government in place in the Congo, and I guess you could say that’s when the U.N. woke and said, ‘Hmm, we can accomplish something here.’ ”



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