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RWANDA MASSACRES WERE AVOIDABLE, GENERAL SAYS

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He said in court Feb.25 that a well-armed UN force could have stopped the 1994 killings

Dateline: ARUSHA, TANZANIA

Gen. Romeo Dallaire is an exceptionally fast talker. Occasionally, the Canadian stops to apologize for the rush. But during his testimony in a cramped courtroom of the International Criminal Tribunal for *Rwanda*, there was a moment when words came to him at great cost.

"It seems ... inconceivable that one can watch ... thousands of people being ... massacred ... every day in the media ... and remain passive," the former United Nations Assistance Mission for *Rwanda* (UNAMIR) commander said as his voice broke and tears fell from his eyes.

He had flown from Canada to Arusha, Tanzania, to become the first senior UN official to tell a UN tribunal that "with a well-armed force of 5,000 men" and the proper mandate, "the UN could have stopped the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of *Rwandans*."

In a day-long testimony strained by emotion, General Dallaire laid bare the sequence of events that led to the *Rwandan genocide*, starting with the downing of a plane carrying *Rwanda's* Hutu president on April 6, 1994, and ending with the slaughter of more than 800,000 people, mostly ethnic Tutsis.

Dallaire's presence in Arusha is paradoxical in itself. He was summoned by the defense team of Jean-Paul Akayesu, a man he never met and about whom he knows nothing.

During his 5-1/2 hours of testimony, the former mayor of Tuba and his alleged role in the massacres was never even brought up.

"We summoned Dallaire as an expert witness," Mr. Akayesu's lawyer, Nicolas Tiangaye, said before the general's testimony.

But according to Pascal Besnier, another defense lawyer, the strategy was to dilute Akayesu's alleged guilt. "He will try to show that if the United Nations was not able to stop the *genocide*, how could Akayesu be expected to?"

Akayesu is charged with more than merely standing by as thousands died, however. His charges range from rape to inciting *genocide* and crimes against humanity.

Dallaire argued that the UN had the means and the power to put a halt to the massacres. He told the court of his attempts to warn his superiors in New York as early as January 1994.

A Jan. 11 memo stated that arms were being distributed among the Hutu majority and lists of Tutsis and moderate Hutus were being drawn up.

The destructive power of the Hutu extremists, he warned, was such that they could "kill 1,000 people in 20 minutes."

"The question is whether a well-equipped force with the proper mandate could have stopped civilians armed with knives and machetes, and I say absolutely, in one week," he said Wednesday.

Outmanned, ill-equipped

But, Dallaire suggested, his less than 3,000-strong peacekeeping force was both undermanned and ill-equipped. His ranks were slashed to 500 after 10 Belgian peacekeepers were killed protecting *Rwanda's* moderate vice president.

"Many people had been pressured into [participating in the killings]; they were acting out of fear. If we had had a force that could have convinced them that it was riskier to go to the barricades than stay at home, we could have stopped it," Dallaire said.

Barricades, or checkpoints, were set up in Kigali, the capital, within hours after the president's plane went down. People were asked to produce identification papers and killed on the spot if they were Tutsis.

Rather than change the mandate of the mission from Chapter 6 to Chapter 7 of the UN charter - a switch that would have sanctioned offensive operations - the UN watched with the rest of the world as an armed majority set out to exterminate the country's minority.

"It was an unimaginable exercise in frustration," Dallaire told the tribunal. "The UN was passive before the massacres."

UNAMIR was sent into *Rwanda* in October 1993 to enforce a power-sharing agreement reached by *Rwanda's* two warring factions: The Hutu-led national army and the Tutsi-dominated rebel *Rwandan* Patriotic Front. Neither of the two factions, Dallaire testified, would have accepted an "intervention force" under Chapter 7.

But there was a way to fight the massacres: Article 17 of the rules of engagement specifically allowed the use of force "to stop or prevent crimes against humanity."

Dallaire said he made this point over and over as the killings spread outside the capital and *genocide* leaders traveled to the farthest corners of the country telling Hutu peasants they were "behind in their work."

UN reluctance

Critics say the memos and faxes to the UN appeared to land in a vacuum.

But Dallaire says the UN's reluctance to engage in *Rwanda* was understandable.

"This was in April 1994. The Americans had lost 18 soldiers in Mogadishu. The Pakistanis had also lost several in Somalia ... the United Nations [forces] were spread out in 16 or 17 different missions around the world," he said. "So here I am at the head of an emasculated force with no resources ... it was not an easy political decision."

But lawyers at the international tribunal say that because it determined the fate of hundreds of thousands, it should come under scrutiny here in Arusha. "I could have subpoenaed [UN Secretary-General] Kofi Annan," says Akayesu's lawyer, Mr. Tiangaye. "He was at the head of all peacekeeping operations."

The UN has diplomatic immunity, so the question of culpable inaction is an academic one.

But many here say it should not be. "If justice is impartial, it should pursue all those responsible," says defense lawyer Mr. Besnier.

"It should go after everyone, irrespective of their position."

Rwanda's Road To Massacres

- **1990:** The rebel *Rwandan* Patriotic Front, largely made up of Tutsi exiles, invades from bases in Uganda.
- **1992-1993:** Talks between the government and rebels lead to a power-sharing deal that dilutes the Hutus' hold on power and gives minority Tutsis a role in government.

October 1993: The United Nations Assistance Mission for *Rwanda* is sent in to enforce the peace accords.

April 6, 1994: A plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, is shot down under mysterious circumstances. Hutu extremists begin the massacre of more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus. The Tutsi-dominated RPF resumes fighting.

July 1994: RPF troops take over the capital, Kigali, and put a stop to the killings.

PHOTO (COLOR): UN ON THE WITNESS STAND: Gen. Romeo Dallaire, former head of the UN peacekeeping force, testified in Arush, Tanzania, that the UN 'could have stopped the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of *Rwandans*'

PHOTO (COLOR): DEFENDANT: Jean-Paul Akayesu is charged with inciting *genocide*

PHOTO (COLOR): DIVIDED COUNTRY: Mists drift over an American-owned plantation in Cyohoha that was the front line for months between the Hutu-led army and Tutsi-led rebels. In 1994, extremist Hutus massacred about 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

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By Lara Santoro, Special to The Christian Science Monitor

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