

As Congo war continues

Kabila gains support from UN, South Africa

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South Africa has shifted its position on the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). At a meeting of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), President Nelson Mandela stated that he now supports the intervention of Angolan, Namibian and Zimbabwean troops on the side of DRC President Laurent Kabila.

Speaking alongside Mandela at the end of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Durban, South Africa, UN secretary-general Kofi Annan also indicated that the US and Western powers are willing to accept a deal that leaves Kabila in power, at least in the western part of the DRC. 'Perhaps a greater effort should have been made on his part to sustain the international support which has been there since the beginning,' Annan said of Kabila. Only a few months ago the UN had denounced Kabila's refusal to allow an investigation into the slaughter of thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees, who had fled into the Congo, fearing reprisals from the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan government for the genocide of Tutsis during 1994.

Rebels fighting the Kabila regime showed reporters the mass graves of Tutsi civilians in Kisangani, the DRC's third largest city. They displayed the bodies of at least 100 Tutsis, believed to have been slaughtered on August 23 when Kabila's troops were driven out of the city. Local residents and rebel leaders claimed that government troops had systematically rounded up and tortured dozens of Tutsi civilians, with many now missing and feared dead.

Kabila has whipped up anti-Tutsi chauvinism over the last month, following his rift with Rwandan Tutsi officers that led the US-backed fighting force against Mobutu Sese Seko, which put him in power last year. An alliance of these officers, Congo Tutsi soldiers and former soldiers of Mobutu's army have fought to

overthrow Kabila since the beginning of August. They are backed by Uganda and Rwanda and now control the eastern part of the Congo. They were defeated in the west by troops from Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola supporting Kabila. There are reports that the US is trying to negotiate with the Zimbabwean government for the safe passage of captured rebel soldiers out of the region.

Congo's state radio has repeatedly broadcast appeals to use 'a machete, a spear, an arrow, a hoe, spades, rakes, nails, truncheons, electric irons, barbed wire, stones ... to kill the Rwandan Tutsis.' The world's press have carried reports and photographs from the capital Kinshasa showing the lynching, necklacing and beating to death of people suspected of being Tutsis--identified merely on the basis of slender build and longer noses. Kabila reportedly has also allowed tens of thousands of interahamwe (Hutu militiamen) responsible for the Rwandan genocide to regroup and train in the Congo, ready to join his army.

The four-day NAM summit had been billed as the high-point of South African diplomacy in the Congo. In the event it was upstaged by Kabila who arrived at the last minute following an appeal from Annan. Kabila rejected peace proposals, denounced Rwanda and Uganda and called for military backing for his government. He then withdrew to his hotel bedroom, consumed two bottles of Chivas Regal whisky and left at 4 a.m. to fly back home.

At the same summit, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe denounced South Africa for supplying arms to Rwanda and allegedly assisting Tanzania in training rebel troops in the Congo conflict. Mugabe also called for another peace conference to be held next week. This appears to have UN backing. Rebel leaders, as well as leaders from Uganda and Rwanda have signalled their

willingness to attend peace negotiations but have stated that they have no intention of losing their control of the eastern part of the Congo.

Whilst Western governments allow Kabila to continue his regime of ethnic cleansing, they have cynically mounted a UN war crimes tribunal into the Rwanadan genocide four years ago. In Arusha, Tanzania, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda found Jean-Paul Akayesu, a former Rwandan mayor, guilty of inciting the massacre of more than 2,000 Tutsis in 1994. Akayesu and Jean Kambanda, the former Hutu prime minister of Rwanda who pleaded guilty last May, are the only two to have been convicted by the court.

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