

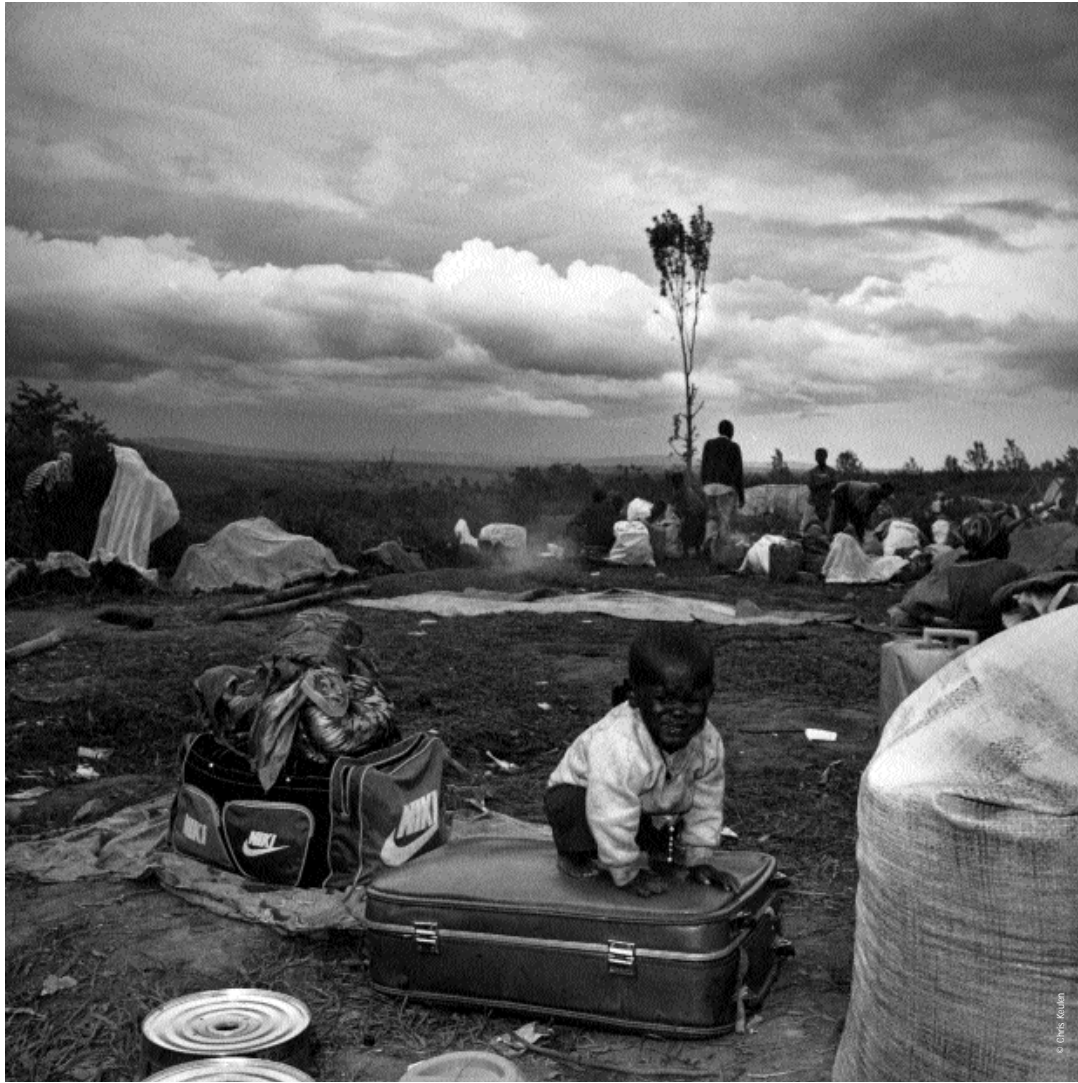
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This booklet is dedicated to the people of Congo, their courage and to all the victims of the wars.

We would like to thank especially all the MSF national staff for sharing with us their stories, their experiences, their memories, and for the incredible work they have carried out day after day, side by side with the populations, over the past ten years.

We would also like to express our gratitude towards the expatriate staff of the MSF-Holland teams who were in the DRC at the time the preparatory work for this booklet was being carried out. Their input, their support and encouragements have been irreplaceable. Thanks to Kate Alberti, Randy Bareham, Frédéric Beaudoin, Brian Bell, Maryse Bonnel, Line Bourgeois, Monica de Castellarnau, Marny Cochiuis, Orla Cook, Annemarie Duijnste, Bente Everts, Graham Fitzgerald, Lindsey Grimshaw, Roelof Hamer, Nicole Henze, Vincent Hoedt, Meike Hülsmann, Maria Kantilli, Corry Kik, Jens Körner, Pierre Kronstrom, Eric-Viet Laperrière, Yannick Lavoie, Lisette 't Manneetje, Beatrice Opiyo, Jason Peat, Minh-Ly Pham-Minh, Danielle Pronk, Peter Rietveld, Christiane & Christoph Rühmich, Jerg Seipel, Sumeet Sodhi, Jan-Peter Stellema, David Tu and Nawel Zahid.

Thanks also to Dr. Steve Collins for the material taken from his report *MSF in transition: a field evaluation of the MSF programmes in the Democratic Republic of Congo during 1997*.



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LIFE UNDER THREAT: ONE FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE

A testimony (Driver ?, North Kivu)

Ten years ago I was living in B., near Shabunda, South Kivu, where I am from.

In 1997, the first war led by Kabila broke out in the area. We could see Rwandan refugees fleeing; the Rwandan Tutsi military were looking for them and massacring them. They would kill men and women – they would put them in a single file and the soldiers would shoot at them. I saw it with my own eyes, especially towards Ulindi river where thousands and thousands of people fell. During the massacre of the Rwandan Hutu refugees, we all had a hard time. One day, the military shot at a refugee near my house, and asked a young Congolese to take the cadaver and get rid of it – as the young man protested, the military took him by the feet and dropped him in a big latrine pit. He died, because the latrine was almost already full.

Unfortunately after this war, another started in 1998. Soon after, a group of Congolese Mai Mai militias arrived from the north, saying that they were coming to protect us against the RCD; they were more than a hundred men, and amongst them, there were Rwandan Hutus and ex-FAR soldiers. The ex-FAR searched all the houses, looking for Tutsi refugees. When they found them, they would kill them in public after having tortured them. They told us that any Congolese suspected of assisting a Tutsi would be submitted to the same punishment. We ourselves, we had nothing to say – we were at their mercy.

Then the Mai Mai started to forcibly recruit people from the area. Sometimes, they would make us go with them to the forest, there we would either have to work their fields, dig coltan, or they would use us as porters.

They would come and get you at any time, even in the middle of the night. There was no time for hesitating once they arrived, because if you loitered just a bit, the roof of your house would be on fire before you were out and you would just burn inside. I saw three women die like that, reduced to ashes inside their houses.

One day, the Mai Mai took my brother's wife. He protested, but the Mai Mai crudely replied: *"if we find a bicycle, we just ride it and you have nothing to say"*. After whipping him, they left with his wife. Two days later they came back – *"here is your bicycle"*, they told him, giving him his wife back.

Another time, in 1999, my mother-in-law went out to the fields to get cassava. She was late, and we were wondering where she was. Then, a woman passed by and told us that she had heard her screaming a little further away. We went for her – we only found her cadaver. She had been decapitated and her body had been cut into pieces. A Mai Mai showed up while I was collecting the pieces of my mother in law's body – he told me that they had killed her because her presence was annoying them, and he forbade me to remove her remnants. One hour later the Mai Mai came and shot at our house. We fled; as we tried to cross the river, my son slipped and drowned – he was eleven years old.

After we buried him, we continued to flee through the forest. One day, as my wife and five of my children had gone out for wood, the Mai Mai took me and my four other children as hostages. They took us to the forest, and had us cultivating and transporting material for them – especially the cartridges and ammunitions that were arriving by plane. There were thousands of us; the Mai Mai were taking people hostage from each

village we would pass through when the RCD army was advancing so that nobody could help the RCD soldiers to identify the Mai Mai's position..

The whole time I was with the Mai Mai they demanded that each person bring them a box of coltan per week. If you had no coltan you simply had to manage to find some... but it was difficult because we had no shovels to dig with. I saw gruesome punishments during that time: people tied up to red ants' nests, eaten alive by these carnivorous insects; other people were whipped to death... and when you were sick, you only had access to medicinal plants – whilst I was as a hostage with the Mai Mai I never even saw an aspirin !!! On the 5th of October, 2001, we heard shooting and mortars coming closer to our position: the RCD was advancing. For us it was good news; it meant that we would finally be reunited with our families. When RCD soldiers met us in the forest, they told us that we could go back to our villages and I immediately headed for Shabunda. There I heard that my family was in another village, more than a hundred kilometres away, so I started walking.

I arrived in B. in November 2001. There, the war between RCD and Mai Mai was also raging. Once more, I fled to the forest; but that time I was alone, because I had lost track of my children in Shabunda. The war was following me – a few days after I had reached another village, the Mai Mai attacked this village and again, I had to hide in the forest for several days. In the meantime, I heard that that my wife and children were in Goma, so when I spotted a plane from the International Committee of the Red Cross on the ground, on my way back to the village, I went to explain my situation to the Red Cross workers and they accepted to bring me back to Goma. There I finally found my wife and five of my children. What a celebration it was !

Just a few days later, in January 2002, the volcano erupted in Goma. Once again, we were forced to flee. Fortunately our house did not disappear under the

lava flow... Eventually we went back to Goma, and I was lucky to find a job and send my children back to school... but I still have no news of the other four. When I hear about what is still happening around Shabunda, I fear that they may have once again fallen into the hands of the Mai Mai.

The war was following me – a few days after I had reached another village, the Mai Mai attacked this village and again, I had to hide in the forest for several days.



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FOREWORD

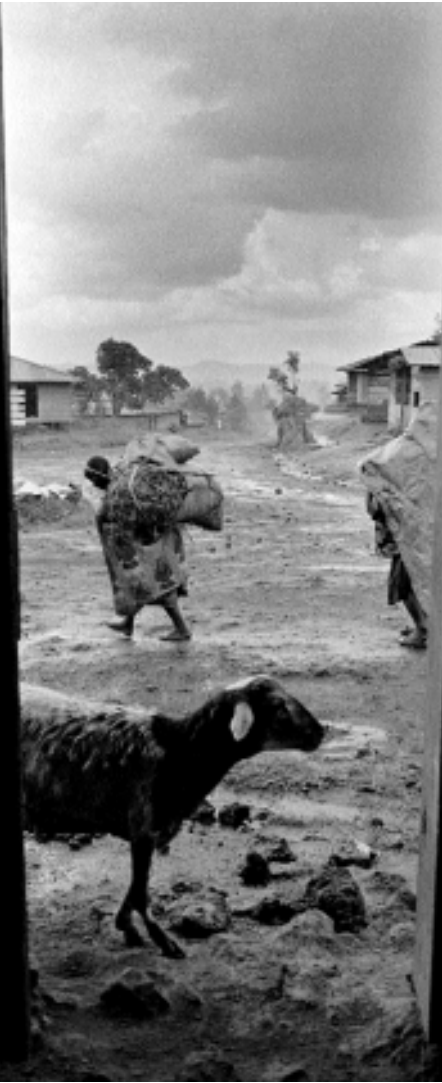
For ten years MSF has been working in the eastern Democratic Republic Congo (DRC). Ten years of assistance to the most vulnerable people victim to unthinkable hardship; but there is no reason for celebration, since the 10 years do not mark an end to the humanitarian crisis. Even though it is one of the largest missions in MSF, the size and breadth of the needs make our interventions seem insignificant. Wherever we look there are massive needs. As one MSF volunteer put it, "wherever we stop the car, we could open a project. But we can't intervene everywhere." It is a painful dilemma for MSF to work amidst such a broad and spectacular spectrum of suffering.

This book is the result of wanting to do more. To bear witness to the human suffering that has been going on for 10 years in the DRC. But also to bear witness to the courage of the people rebuilding their lives over and over again, in a world dominated by complex armed conflicts, waves of displacements and waves of refugees. In this booklet people tell their stories; the majority of them work as national staff with MSF. They have been at the same time relief actors, spectators and victims. Others are mothers, others patients we met during the course of our medical work. All wanted to share their experiences with us; they want the world to know.

The stories are presented in this booklet in a year by year sequence. From 1992 to 2002, for each chapter, a short introduction will recount the main events that took place during the year; then, the testimonies of the people will describe how they endured these events, how it affected them, their lives and those of their compatriots. The recounting of events is not exhaustive, and does not pretend to be an academic chronicle of the war in the DRC. It only intends to offer a framework to understand, in which setting the people's stories have taken place.

With this booklet MSF shares their concern for the ongoing crisis in DRC and calls for action to end the suffering of the people.

Lisette Luyck, President of the Board



10 YEARS OF CONFLICT, VIOLENCE AND HUMAN SUFFERING

"[1998] where I was living, there were constant attacks on the village – the military would kill anybody. My own cousin died at that time. They would even go up to the mountains around the village, and kill the people they met in the fields... When there was fighting, we would spend the entire following day burying the cadavers".
(Guard?, North Kivu)

Violence, killings and massacres like the ones described above have been going on for ten years in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), seemingly unnoticed by the international community. In August 2002 the BBC reported that UN observers recently discovered several mass graves in Ituri Province of north-eastern Democratic Republic of Congo; the one-minute update, telling of scores of bodies found hacked to pieces by machete was buried behind news of roiled stock markets and new peace talks in the Middle East. The victims in Ituri remained unnamed, the perpetrators anonymous. Few newspapers in Europe bothered to note the story. It was an unusual drop of attention, and by the next day it had completely disappeared.

Massacres, mass rape and displacement in the DRC have long since ceased to be news for the rest of the world. If anything, it was a surprise that this incident made it to the BBC's back pages.

Ten years of torment

2002 marks the 10th anniversary of ongoing conflicts and violence in the DRC. It is the latest and most tragic part of a painful history marked by the brutality of Belgian colonial domination and the failure of the state in the years following independence. The subse-

quent chaotic conflicts have followed on from 30 years of the gradual disintegration of the Congolese state under Mobutu, who was deposed in 1997 in the wake of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Mobutu's name had become the synonymous with the kleptocratic state. The country's vast mineral resources were sold as concessions to foreign companies but the proceeds rarely if ever filled the state budget. Civil servants went for years without pay during the last decade of Mobutu's rule. Soldiers from the Congolese army turned to looting and extortion to finance both salaries and equipment. Particularly in the later years of his rule, the pillage of state assets and the neglect of the state sector have undermined faith in the possibility of state development in Congo.

Conflicts in the eastern DRC started in 1992 in the east of the country in the Masisi plains of North Kivu. Thousands were killed and hundreds of thousands driven from their homes as rival Hunde and Banyarwanda¹ militias fought over the land ownership and political control of the region – the Hunde claiming that the Banyarwanda groups as immigrants from Rwanda had no political rights in the DRC. In 1994, the violence of the Rwandan genocide spilled over the border into Congo, along with millions of refugees and the remnants of the armies and guerrilla groups that conducted the genocide – groups burning with ideologies of ethnic hatred. War had already started in DRC but the spill over from the genocide turned it into the seemingly endless torment of a people.

Initially limited to the eastern provinces, the war spread to encompass the whole of the country with the rebellion launched by Laurent Désiré Kabila in 1996.

¹ See glossary



Aimed at sweeping Mobutu from power, but also at eliminating the Hutu militias that played a key role in the Rwandan genocide, the rebellion had strong support from Rwanda and Uganda. This phase of the war was marked by widespread and indiscriminate violence against the civilian population, particularly against Rwandan refugees, who had been seeking shelter in the Eastern DRC since 1994. MSF was witness to horrible massacres against the refugee population which was left without protection or aid.

In 1998, Rwanda and Uganda became disenchanted with Kabila particularly as he was not living up to his promise of preventing further incursions of the Hutu militias into Rwanda. They again began to support rebel groups seeking to overthrow the Kabila government in Kinshasa. The attack failed only when Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia sent troops into Congo to defend Kabila. The influx of foreign forces and the partial division of DRC into rival zones of influence led to the conflict being labelled Africa's First World War.

Killing, torture and rape as weapons of war

The ten-year war has yielded inhuman levels of violence. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) calculated that the war had caused, directly or indirectly, 2.5 million deaths between August 1998 and April 2001². In some areas surveyed they calculated that 75% of the children never made it to their second birthday. The IRC surveys indicated that at least one out of seven of these deaths were the direct result of violence. Almost 20% of the respondents in a MSF survey in 2001³ had witnessed torture in the previous 3 years.

The MSF teams on the ground are in touch daily with the personal and physical results of this violence. In Shabunda, South Kivu Province, the militias surrounding the town repeatedly kidnapped local villagers and held them in semi-slavery in the forest. They tortured and raped women who were kidnapped over the course of many months. Some of those who have survived this experience were so mutilated that they required reconstructive surgery. Unable to provide this level of service in Shabunda, MSF has been forced to fly these women to other hospitals where the appropriate surgery is possible. Sometimes the perpetrators are from the same village as the victims, reflecting a corruption of the social fabric which even peace and an end to the war will not quickly remedy.

Displacement and malnutrition as the result of the war

Displacement has become a way of life for much of the population over the 10 years of war. Constantly threatened by the violence of the clashes, victims of recurrent attacks and pillaging of their villages, the civilian populations are often forced to flee from their homes until some kind of stability has returned. This can take several hours, several days, or even several years. In the meantime they seek refuge either in the forest, where they generally live in makeshift huts; or in another village, living in very precarious conditions at someone else's house. In July 2002, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) esti-

mated that up to 760,000 people were displaced in North Kivu province – some of them have never been able to make it back home since the start of the clashes in 1992-1993.

The permanent insecurity, the recurrent pillaging perpetrated by the various armed factions and the resulting displacement are direct causes of malnutrition and lack of access to health care. Of the 503 malnourished children admitted in one of the MSF therapeutic feeding centres in March, April and May 2002, at least 24% were still unable to return to their homes and many others were forced to flee repeatedly to the bush because of the frequent attacks. For many of the displaced in the feeding centres in North Kivu this displacement is only one in a series of displacements and attacks on them over the last decade. Each attack, each displacement cuts further into their ability to survive.

If the health care system before the war was already poor outside of the major towns, the last decade of war has destroyed most of what was left

Lack of access to health care

Everywhere in the DRC the chronic lack of investment in the health system and the disruption of the economic activity related to the war have led to an almost complete lack of access to health care. The conflict constantly undermines the local structures, quality drugs are often unavailable and the medical staff is heavily underpaid. If the health care system before the war was already poor outside of the major towns, the last decade of war has destroyed most of what was left. In addition, the war has left the majority of the people without sufficient means to access the little health care still available. According to a 2001 MSF survey, 67.4% of the population in Basankusu area (Equateur) was without access to health care over the eight months covered by the survey.

² Mortality Survey, Eastern DR Congo (February – April 2001). International Rescue Committee, 2001.
³ Accès aux soins et à la violence au Congo (RDC): Résultat de cinq enquêtes épidémiologiques, MSF, December 2001



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HIV-Aids in a context of war

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 90% of the world's 36 million people infected with the HIV virus and the DRC is no exception. In Bukavu, a town in South Kivu where MSF has started an AIDS treatment project, a significant increase in the rate of HIV infection amongst tuberculosis patients – from 15% to 40% – was observed in 1998; an increase likely spread by the massive flow of refugees and soldiers between 1994 and 1996. There are possibly hundreds of thousands of asymptomatic HIV infected persons who in the next 3-5 years will become symptomatic and require extensive medical assistance. The health care system is not equipped to deal with this reality. Without urgent interventions the HIV epidemic will continue to grow, with devastating social and human consequences. Unfortunately, in the context of a war, the poverty and destruction left by the war in eastern DRC is

an undeniable vector of the epidemic:

“Unsafe sex is better benefit than safe sex – my clients pay one US Dollar to have sex with a condom, and between two and five dollars if I accept not to use the condom. The money I earn is still not enough to live properly – it is only enough to buy food for one meal a day”, a young woman working as a prostitute told MSF.

No end in sight?

Although the Lusaka peace process launched in 1999 has generated numerous ceasefire agreements, it has still failed to produce a halt to the violence in the east of the country or a viable political solution to the conflict. The peace process has excluded various armed groups still active in the east of the country, including the *Interhamwe*, the Hutu militias involved in the Rwandan genocide, different Burundian rebel groups as well as the Congolese “Mai Mai” militias. The peace agreements have done little to stop the violence and repression. In the middle of 2001 the United Nations announced the beginning of a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process of armed groups, specifically *Interhamwe* and ex-FAR. However, almost a year later, only a handful of fighters have been demobilized and disarmed in the process.

The testimonies included below reflect a small slice of the reality of DRC over the last 10 years. They bear witness to horrendous abuses and crimes on a scale which should have provoked the world's outrage and the world's care. Instead, the Congolese have been left largely to the famous Congolese ability to survive, to create hope in the midst of despair.

In September 2002, as we finalize this publication, Rwandan and Ugandan troops have effectively started to withdraw from the eastern DRC following bilateral agreements between DRC and neighboring governments. The international community warmly welcomes the initiative, but people in DRC are worried that the power vacuum will only lead to more bloodshed and conflict. For the people of Shabunda the latest troop movements have meant yet another flight from their homes in fear...

1992

POLITICAL CRISIS, HARASSMENT AND ETHNIC TENSIONS

Intensified by the fall of the Berlin wall and the international pressure to move towards democratisation, anti-Mobutu sentiments began to boil from the end of the 1980s and eventually exploded into mass rioting and looting in many cities in September 1991. In December 1992, unpaid soldiers rioted again and pillaged the towns of Kisangani, Goma and Kolwesi, subjecting the population to heavy military harassment.

The subsequent economical decline and the withdrawal of foreign support caused a near collapse of effective health services in Zaire. Due to a crucial lack of drugs and medical supplies, the poorer part of the population was left with little, if any, access to health care services. In the same year, ethnic tensions between the Hunde and the Banyarwanda started to worsen in the Masisi plains of North Kivu. The Banyarwanda, both Hutus and Tutsis, had migrated from Rwanda to North Kivu from the 1940s until 1955 as labour force to work in the Masisi plantations. Since then the new immigrants had been occupying the lands traditionally used by the local Hunde, Nande and Nyanga ethnic groups for hunting. In addition to the rapid economic success of the Banyarwanda, competition for control of the land provoked a strong resentment among the local ethnic groups. Political conflicts, combined with continuing clashes over land, created a highly volatile situation.





SOLDIERS RIOTS AND LOOTING OF GOMA

Cook ?

During three days in 1992, the military looted the houses of Goma, neighbourhood by neighbourhood. One day, they looted my neighbour's house; they came to my house as well, but my little brother wouldn't open the door to them. When I came home from work they came back again. They asked me for money and medicines – they knew I was working for MSF. I had to explain that I was not medical, and that therefore I didn't have any medicines; I gave them ten dollars and fortunately they were happy with it – but they slapped my brother in the face. A few houses away from my house, they raped an eight-year old girl; she had to be taken to the hospital, and her parents decided to leave Goma almost immediately. At that time the people in Goma were scared, because they were not used to the war, the lootings and everything. When things calmed down, the people decided not to walk after eight o'clock at night anymore, because everybody was afraid to meet the soldiers.

Cook ?

One day that I was at work the military arrived in my house; they knew that I was working for MSF, and that I had some money. They threatened my wife, and almost beat her to death; they even stabbed her in the legs – we had to bring her to the hospital. Then, they looted everything I had. Fortunately, a soldier who was a friend from my home village proposed that he stay at my place, in uniform, to protect my house from further attacks. This disorder in Goma lasted nearly six months.

BEGINNING OF ETHNIC CLASHES IN MASISI

Mechanic ?

The instability in Masisi area started in 1992. At this time, the Hutu youth of North Kivu created a kind of association, the Mutuelle des Agriculteurs des Virunga (MAGRIVI) focused on cattle and agriculture; but it was also pretty politicised, and it soon became the Hutu militias against the Congolese ethnic groups.

Fearing that the Hutus would get hold of their territory, the Hunde also organised themselves, together with the other ethnic groups, and tried to take back parts of the territory that the Hutus were occupying. There were many massacres – indiscriminate massacres against men and women, violation of women, houses burnt with petrol, many wounded, and many victims of the clashes...

In my family, during the clashes, eight persons were buried in a latrine hole; in my paternal uncle's family, everybody died. One of my cousins lost two children, mutilated with machete. Another cousin of mine was tortured – they cut her head off, pricked the head with a spear, put the spear outside, and the sparrow hawks bit the flesh until there were only bones left. They cut off another cousin's breasts, obliged her to eat them and then killed her by pricking her body with a spear, from the anus to the throat.

In 1994, as a consequence of what was happening in Rwanda, the clashes between Hutus and Tutsis also broke out in the area; I personally saw a Tutsi woman being caught by the Interahamwe – she had her baby on her back, and one of the men stabbed the baby's neck with a machete. His head was hanging down on one side, and had to be stitched up by an MSF doctor.

1993

THOUSANDS OF VICTIMS OF ETHNIC STRIFE

Following several years of interethnic tension, an attack by Hunde on a Banyarwanda village in 1993 sparked all out war between the ethnic groups of the Masisi plains of North Kivu. Between April and July, at least 6000 people were killed and 350,000 were driven from their homes and villages, hiding in schools, churches or with relatives. Food was scarce and the health of the displaced people deteriorated rapidly. There were sharp increases in the incidence of malaria, respiratory infections, diarrhoea and dysentery. Medical facilities in the areas rapidly became overburdened as a result of the enormous inflow of new patients.

In October, the coup in Burundi and the subsequent outburst of ethnic violence led to the arrival of 80,000 refugees in Zaire. Some of them found refuge with relatives and friends, others stayed in camps around the South Kivu town of Uvira.



INTER ETHNIC WAR BREAKS OUT IN NORTH KIVU

Nurse /

In 1993, the Hutus were killing the villagers, burning the houses, attacking people on the road – it was very difficult to move from the village. It was surrounded by the Hutus, and when you would go to the fields, you would meet the enemy who would kill you straight away. We were scared of going to the fields and leaving the children alone at home. We couldn't find salt anymore, it was very difficult to find food to eat. Many of my relatives were killed either on the road, or in the field. At a given moment, they said that the Hutus were going to enter my village and kill the people – I fled, and was displaced for one year because of the war. Life was very hard, because I had left my village without taking anything.

My whole family has been subjected to pillaging, and several of my relatives have died. There is no one who can help me

Nurse aid /

During the inter ethnic war, the people were killing each other in the forests; some people would flee to the bush in disarray and leave their children behind in the villages – the children were then killed. I saw a woman running with her baby on her back thinking that the baby was still alive – his head had already been cut off.

I lost my own paternal uncle during the war. They had cut off his head and his penis and put his head and his right hand on top of a tree, on the roadside.

Guard ?

During the inter ethnic war between the Hunde and the Hutu, all the Hunde population of the area sought refuge in my village. The living conditions were very difficult; we could hardly find food to eat – everybody was pillaging other people's fields. Some displaced people had made it to our house; others had died on the way, killed with machetes, their houses burnt.

Among the people who were killed were members of my family – my aunt, her husband and her two children. The village where we were before was attacked, all we all hid – the Hutus found and killed them.

Patient /, war displaced (North Kivu)

During the inter ethnic war in Masisi, between the Hunde and the Hutus, we had to flee our village. Our house was burnt; we managed to escape thanks to the priests of our village, but two of my sisters were not able to escape – they were killed. After that, one of my brothers was forcibly enlisted in Mobutu's army to fight against the Hutus and he died on the battlefield.

Now I've been displaced again for one year because of the war of the Interahamwe. In the village where I am from, they attacked my house several times. Each time they would ask for food, clothes, cattle; when we refused to give out our goods, they would torture us. Sometimes, if we finally gave something we had hidden, they would stop torturing us. I was tortured twice, together with my husband; they bludgeoned us, and with the butt of their machetes. After the third attack, we decided to leave.

Because of the tortures the Interahamwe inflicted on me, I suffer a lot from the chest: I cannot carry anything heavy, and I hardly can cultivate. My husband also suffers from the torture he has been subjected to; as we are displaced, we had been given a little field, but neither I or him have the strength to cultivate. We eat with difficulty. We live in a little house made of straw that we rent, but we are sometimes chased away from it because we don't have the means to pay the three dollars rent. The house has holes everywhere, and we sleep on reed beds that my husband made.

My whole family has been subjected to pillaging, and several of my relatives have died. There is no one who can help me.

Guard ?

I lost my mother during the inter ethnic war in 1993. At that time, we were living in a village, in N. area; this

village was attacked, all the houses were looted and burnt, many people were killed. We had to flee, leaving behind us our goats, our chicken, everything... My mother went all the way to the village where my sister was living, but the Hutus attacked this village as well and she died.

Since then, the Hutus have been occupying my house and my fields; as of today, I still haven't been able to go back there – the people have refused to leave my field, and there is a law saying that we are not allowed to recuperate the fields we had once abandoned.

Patient /, war displaced (North Kivu)

I've been displaced since 1993, when the inter ethnic war broke out in the area. We first fled to T; but malaria is endemic there, and we had to move again after six months. We always live in insecurity. The Interahamwe attack us frequently – they besieged the village for the last time three months ago, and they burnt our houses. Several times, all my possessions were looted.

Because of that, we frequently have to flee to the forest. There, we build a shelter the best we can, with tarpaulins and branches. We stay there until the situation improves – a few hours, a few days, we never know how long it can last.

In S., I live with my husband and my children. I have already lost six children because of malnutrition; it's a real problem in my village, but people don't recognize it. They think the state of health of the children is due to other things, to sorcery for example. I think that my children's malnutrition is due to malaria that we do not have the means to cure.

THE REFUGEE CAMPS IN UVIRA

Mechanic ?

When the war broke out around Butaré, in Rwanda, UNHCR asked the NGOs to build a camp in Uvira, because they knew that the people fleeing from the clashes would move through Burundi towards South Kivu, in Congo. One week after the camp was ready, the refugees arrived en masse from Rwanda and

Burundi. There I saw how people could die from hunger, from thirst, and even from fear – many of them had left their country under shellfire, seeing their companions fall dead beside them, and as soon as they arrived at the camp they would collapse under the weight of the emotions. Every day I would see more than six people dying.

In the camp where the Burundian refugees were, there were constant frictions between the people, especially between the people from the South of Burundi and those from the North; since Burundi had become a republic, the south had always been in power, dominating the north, and in the camp people from these different regions would not get along with each other. They would kill each other; people would constantly disappear. When we started to ask questions, they told us that there were two groups of young people; one from the North and one from the South, who were eliminating all suspects to be on the other side. Those from the North were particularly mean. Often we didn't understand their objectives, we were not able to have a discussion with them – we didn't know what to do. One day I nearly got killed with machete: one of the expatriates was married to a Tutsi woman and we entered the camp together with her – they surrounded us and threatened to kill us, because they couldn't accept seeing a Tutsi inside the camp.

1994

A MILLION PEOPLE ADRIFT

On April 6th 1994, following an attack on an aircraft in which President Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Ntuyamira of Burundi were killed, a human tragedy started in Rwanda: the genocide of some 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in three months. In July 1994, the Tutsi controlled resistance movement, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launched a major counter offensive against the Hutu led government. A million refugees, mainly Hutus, crossed the border between Rwanda and Zaire within a few days, in July 1994. Estimates put their numbers at 15,000 an hour in the afternoon of the 13th of July. A million people adrift, without water, food or any facilities. After only five days, a dreadful cholera epidemic broke out in Goma resulting in the death of tens of thousands of Rwandans.

After several weeks, several refugee camps formed and the health situation of the refugees had become fairly stable. However the security situation in the refugee camps deteriorated considerably. People implicated in the genocide – “Interahamwe” Hutu militias, ex-Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR) soldiers and other community leaders – were quick to regain positions of prominence in the camps and gradually began to subject the refugee population to a reign of terror. Those indicating a desire to return to Rwanda were accused of collaboration with the new government and put their lives at risk.



THE RWANDAN REFUGEE CRISIS

Nurse ?

The Tutsi refugees were the first ones to arrive from Rwanda, in April 1994; around 4000 of them settled in a camp near Goma where I started working.

At that time, the massacres had just started in the neighbouring country, and some were taking place right across the border with Goma. From the shore, we could see all kinds of dead bodies floating on the Kivu Lake – decapitated women, castrated men, women without breasts, who had been thrown into the water on the Rwandan shore and brought by the flow to the Congolese side of the lake. In the camps, we were also confronted by people who had been injured by machete; some were treated by us, but some had to be transferred to the French military hospital in Goma given the seriousness of the wound – mutilation of the arm, machete wound on the neck...

I really found out then that people could die suddenly, just like that

The Tutsis stayed one and a half month in the camp, while the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) proceeded against the Hutus in Rwanda. When they finally took over the country, the refugees left the camp to go back to Rwanda. Then the Hutus started arriving in Goma, and it became a crazy flow, going back and forth between Goma and Rwanda.

The Hutu refugees arrived in the space of two weeks; they were coming by foot, by truck, by bus – there was a terrible overflow in Goma. Some of them were arrived exhausted, especially the ones who had walked all the way to the border; some were so tired and starving that they died on arrival. The dead bodies were mostly of children and old people.

During the night in the camp, we could see the men

circulate freely with arms, sometimes with grenades. Even in the consultation room, the men were armed to the teeth – they were using arms in the camp, especially for settling of scores. The people told us with enthusiasm about the number of Tutsis they had killed; even an eight year-old child told us that he had killed two Tutsis – an eight year-old child ! I know he was telling the truth. At that time there was a message being broadcast by the radio: "If you see a Tutsi beside you; man, woman, child, kill him before he kills you". When the Hutu refugees settled in the camp, there was a Hutu man who really had a Tutsi morphology (the nose, the Achilles' tendons, the hands) – he was shot in the thorax if I remember well. They brought him to us in emergency, but he died of his wound.

Cook ?

In the beginning, when the refugees were staying on the streets, I saw many dead bodies – I couldn't understand how people could die like that, there were even innocent people who had nothing to do with the genocide. You would even see dead children with their mother sitting next to them, alone, with nobody to turn to. Normally here in Africa when someone dies, all the neighbours and friends give assistance and consolation – in this case, the mothers were completely abandoned.

I, myself I sheltered two women who had both lost their husbands during the genocide; they both had a child. I had met them on the road; they had asked me for money, and I had suggested that they come to my house to eat something – my wife then proposed that they stay with us. When I started to take care of them they would sometimes act strangely, like sitting alone in a corner and not answering your questions. It took them a few months to start feeling comfortable, to forget about what they had experienced; but they could not stand to hear talk about the Tutsis, because they were the ones who had killed their husbands. One of the women told us that the Tutsis had asked her husband to have sex with their fifteen year old daughter – he refused, and they killed him.

These two women lived with us for one and a half years.

They left when Kabila entered Goma, because people said that he was coming to chase the Hutus. I have had no news of them since then.

THE OUTBREAK OF CHOLERA IN GOMA

Nurse ?

The cholera outbreak started two weeks after the Hutu refugees arrived in Goma. At that time the camps were not yet organized, and the refugees had sought shelter in the churches, the schools and the stadiums. Many Congolese families were also sheltering refugees; we felt so sorry for them, seeing them in the streets, sleeping outside – we had to take care of them. I sheltered a Rwandan woman with her two children for two days, until she was allowed to enter one of the camps. Her husband had been killed in Rwanda. I even remember her name. When they left my house I lost track of them. I tried to find them through the Red Cross, but in vain. I don't know what happened to them; if they died there or not. The children were six and ten years old.

Suddenly the cholera epidemic spread and people started to die en masse – not only Rwandese but also Congolese; especially those who were sheltering refugees. At that time I was working in the health post of one of the only organized refugee camps near Goma; we were completely overwhelmed. To get rid of the dead bodies, the people would put them on the side of the road, wrapped in mats, piled one on top of the other; cubic metres of them, like animals. Trucks would collect them and bring them to mass graves. There were cadavers all over the town, it was impossible to count them. At that time I thought life was really negative. The things that I saw affected me so much, that the images of what I witnessed still haven't been erased from my mind.

Mechanic ?

Very soon after the Hutu refugees arrived in Goma, they began to fall ill and to die one after the other. Sometimes you would see someone walking around at

eight o'clock in the morning, and by the afternoon you would see his or her cadaver lying in the street. I saw five people like that. You would see the dead bodies on the side of the road, like stones. There was even an organisation in charge of burying the people – they would collect them from the street, throw them into the vehicles and bring them to mass graves. In our neighbourhood, one of the families was affected by the disease; they almost lost a child. The air was extremely polluted in Goma – there were places where you could not go without holding your nose. There was such a terrible atmosphere in town. It was so painful to see all these dead bodies in the streets that I would always come home from school with a terrible headache. That year I also lost my little sister; she was eleven years old, and a Congolese soldier in a car just hit her. I really found out then that people could die suddenly, just like that.

1995

ETHNIC CLEANSING REARS ITS HEAD

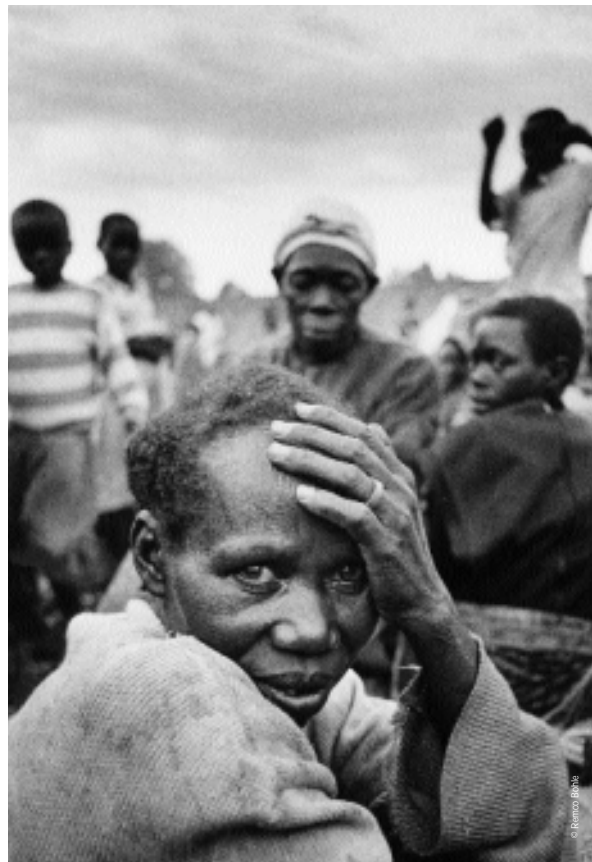
During the first half of 1995, the security situation in the Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire showed no improvement. Although the leaders of the former Rwandan government had attempted to improve their image, the extremist Hutu camp leaders still had the refugees in their grasp. Those who, through their propaganda, had urged the Hutu population to commit genocide were still walking around in the camps, manipulating the refugees through their control of the information channels and perpetuating extremism among the population. The militarisation of the region continued, with the camps being turned into strategic bases for nightly incursions into Rwanda and possible further attacks on the neighbouring country.

In the same year, ethnic tensions in the Masisi area, North Kivu, broke out again⁴ between the local Hunde and the Banyarwanda, heightened this time by extremist Hutu elements of the Rwandan refugee population. The fighting which began in June 1995 reached peaks of violence in November. In addition, as a consequence of the Rwandan ethnic conflict spilling over into Zaire, Tutsis became direct targets from all sides. Between July 1994 and the end of 1995, 38,000 Tutsis had been forced to flee to Rwanda⁵.

⁴ See chapters 1992-1993

⁵ UNHCR Goma statistics from 1995





ETHNIC CLASHES RESUME IN MASISI AREA

Nurse aid ?

When the Rwandan refugees arrived, in 1994-95, they linked up with the Hutu people already living in Zaire. These refugees had arms and armies, and they united their forces with the Hutus to take back all the villages held by the Hunde. The refugees were selling arms, even to the Hunde.

The first attack on my village took place one year after the beginning of the clashes, in July 1996, and caused many deaths. It lasted the whole day, from 5 am until 4.30 pm; Mobutu's special army – the "Division Spéciale Présidentielle" – together with the Mai Mai defended the village, but eight young men I knew from the village died, and there were around thirty wounded – at that time, I was working at the health centre and I was in charge of doing the dressing of bullet wounds. Nine women had miscarriages as a consequence of the fear they experienced during the shooting.

Driver ?

In 1995, I was working with the Office for International Migrations (OIM); we were repatriating the Tutsis from Masisi, who were saying that they were going home because their "brothers" had retaken the country – even the priests abandoned the churches. Many of them were following their sons who had already left the country back in 1990 to join Kagame's army. International agencies like OIM had to repatriate the Tutsis, because they feared harassment by the Mai Mai and the Hutus. The danger was especially to go through Sake, 30 km. away from Goma, where there were many Mai Mai, and through Mugunga camp, in Goma, where there were still many Hutu soldiers among the refugees. One night, around seven Tutsi families arrived from Kisangani to go back to Rwanda; I still remember the ladies – they were gorgeous women. They spent the night in an orphanage in Goma – they were massacred by Hutu militaries coming from Mugunga camp. The army came to pick up the bodies, and they were buried in a mass grave.

Nurse ?

Towards the beginning of 1995, the Interahamwe and the former Rwandan Hutu military, the "ex-FAR", started to target the Tutsis living in North Kivu; they would kill them, burn their houses, loot their cattle... Once, they locked up a group of Tutsis who had sought shelter in a monastery – fortunately the monks alerted the Mai Mai, and they came to defend the Tutsis. Many Tutsis thus fled to Rwanda; the Hunde would transport them in trucks covered with tarpaulin – they said they were transporting coffee, because if the Hutus living in Mugunga refugee camp would find them, they would kill the driver and all the refugees.

Later in 1996, the war between the Hutu Interahamwe and the Hunde Mai Mai resumed all over North Kivu; the Mai Mai would attack the villages and kill the people, and they would come back with pieces of dead

Nine women had miscarriages as a consequence of the fear they experienced during the shooting

bodies, like the heads of the victims, or human flesh that they were eating – I saw them. They also abducted people.

During these clashes, Mobutu created special units to put an end to the war – "Opération Kimya" (calm) and "Opération Mbata" (slap). During this period, one day, these troops caught all poorly-dressed young people in Sake, 30 km. west of Goma, stating that they were Mai Mai – at two o'clock that morning, they killed them all and threw their bodies in the river.

Nutritionist ?

I am from South Kivu, but I spent five and a half years working in North Kivu in the early 90's. In 1996, many displaced Hutu people were arriving in the area, fleeing from the violence; in the area where I was working, there were more than six thousand of them, staying in the schools and the churches. Many of them wanted to stay, because they had been walking for many days, but

they didn't really feel secure; people were saying that the Mai Mai were approaching, so most of the Hutus carried on further east.

Myself, I also had to flee at a certain time. The people from my ethnic group – the "Shi" – started to be assimilated to the Tutsis, and the Mai Mai began to target us. In a neighbouring market, three Shi merchants had been killed for being accused of dealing with the Tutsis. At that time, I was very scared for my wife, who has a Tutsi morphology. I sent her to Goma, and for two months we were separated.

1996

REBEL OFFENSIVE RESULTS IN HORRIFYING MASSACRES

The Masisi area in which heavy fighting had broken out again in 1995⁶ remained a war zone in 1996. Armed bands controlled the region, attacking villages, burning down homes and looting health centres and parishes. Massacres were perpetrated throughout the area by all sides. In May 1996 an MSF team found evidence of a massacre in which at least hundred Tutsis were brutally slaughtered. The constant high level of violence led to the displacement of over 300,000 people, of which 15,000 sought refuge in neighbouring Rwanda. The healthcare system had completely collapsed and the only two hospitals that were operational at the end of 1996 could only serve one ethnicity, leaving the vast majority of the population without access to secondary health care⁷.

At the end of 1996, chaos broke out all over eastern Zaire when rebels took up arms against the army of President Mobutu. The rebels were soon joined by other political dissidents to form the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL), led by Laurent-Desiré Kabila. It was supported both by Rwanda and Uganda. Rwanda was avid for wiping out the remnants of its former Hutu government who were still retraining and rearming troops in the Kivus, Uganda was willing to destroy the Zairian rear bases of the Ugandese rebels Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). The rebels attacked the camps where some 1,2 million Burundian and Rwandan refugees had been living since 1994. In a massive exodus, hundreds of thousands of refugees, along with the local Zairian population were driven into the jungle by the rebels and subjected to horrifying massacres. Others had no choice but to go back to Rwanda.

By November 1996 ADFL forces had already occupied a large part of eastern Zaire.

⁶ See Previous chapter

⁷ See MSF report: *Ethnic cleansing rears its head in Zaire*, November 1996



THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR

Nurse ?

In 1996 I was in Bukavu when the war broke out – it was the first time I had experienced such events. At five in the afternoon, we started to hear shooting, and it went on all night long with heavy artillery; we were lying on the floor, on our stomach, under the beds, and we had no food. We could see Tutsi military coming from Rwanda. On arrival, they already knew which people they were going to target – they would go and get them, and take them to an unknown destination. It was a settling of scores with the families who had mistreated the Tutsis before the war. I know of a Tutsi family who had moved to Rwanda before the events and whose cows had almost all been eaten by the Congolese people; during the war, the owner came back to Congo as a Rwandan soldier, and killed more than five young men who had taken the cows.

The patients who could walk fled in disarray – around twenty patients were left behind, immobilized in their beds with tractions

While I was in Bukavu, the military looted my house and took all I had.

Nurse ?

Just before the Kabila war broke out in Goma, landmines started to blow up in the city. At that time, I was working in one of the refugee camps, north of Goma; every day a truck would pick up the staff to go to the camp. One day, our truck was blown up by one of these landmines – the people sitting in the front of the truck were very seriously injured. One of my colleagues had a fractured clavicle, and another man had a fractured leg. Fortunately, those who were sitting at the back of the truck – including me – were not badly affected. Then, four or five months later, on the same road, only two hundred meters from the place where the truck had been blown up before, the UNHCR bus that was driving us to work was again blown up by a landmine; and this time it was a bloodbath. Those who were

sitting in the front were mutilated, and some of them died. Amongst these people there was a nurse who lost her two legs; another nurse who lost one leg; two guards who died straight away and another guard who received pieces of landmine in his eyes... We were very shocked. I lost close friends, colleagues, school comrades and many others are now disabled. I say to myself that God protected me during all these events.

Then, when the Kabila war started, the Tutsis organized raids on Goma to empty the refugee camps. At that time I was working at the Red Cross hospital; when they started to drop bombs, the patients who could walk fled in disarray – around twenty patients were left behind, immobilized in their beds with tractions. When we went back to the hospital, two weeks later, we found them dead, their bodies still hanging from the traction.

Mechanic ?

One day, on a Thursday morning, we were stopped on the way to school; they told us not to pass by anymore, and to go back home. We heard bullet crackles; the clashes were starting north of Goma. The next morning, bombs started to fall on Goma.

Everybody fled. Some people even fled by foot to Kisangani, which is located some 550 Km away from Goma – my own father walked a whole month to get there. I fled with the rest of the family towards the north, and so did a lot of Rwandan refugees. Some of them settled down somewhere on the way; there, they were massacred by the Rwandan army that was accompanying Kabila's forces, and by the Mai Mai. They didn't let anybody live; men, women, children – they eliminated whole families, so that nobody would be able to claim. I saw them on my way back to Goma – it was two days after the massacre. You could see dead bodies all over the place, and even corpses floating in the water. Their skin had turned bright white. It was the first time I was seeing dead bodies like that. Their skin looked as if it was rubber; you had the impression that the bones were just floating inside...

Nurse ?

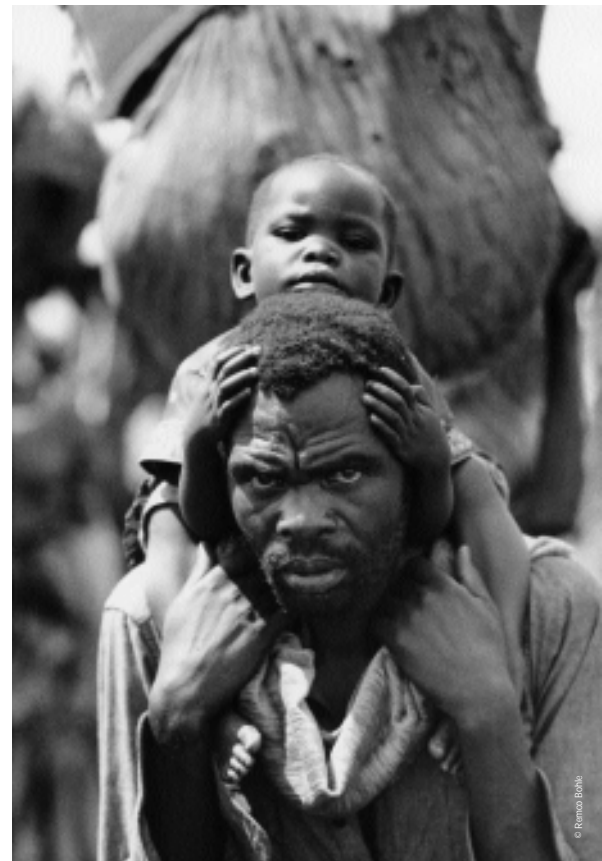
When the Kabila war broke out, I fled by foot westwards; while we were fleeing, the Rwandese supporting Kabila would drop bombs on us and shoot at the people – they would especially target the nice cars, because they suspected them of being Mobutu's military. A bomb exploded just in front of me; it killed three people, right in front of my eyes. Another man walking in front of me was hit by a bullet in the head; and a car nearby was hit by a rocket – only two people made it out alive. Then a bullet passed right next to my own head. It is God who saved me that time. In fact the Rwandese wanted to kill the Hutu refugees and Mobutu soldiers, but they couldn't differentiate between them and the rest of the population – they would just target everybody.

When we arrived near Bukavu, the road was blocked and we had to climb a little hill to reach the town; on the top of the hill, the military was waiting for us, looking for Mobutu soldiers. They were checking if the people passing by had socks marks on their calves, because Mobutu soldiers used to tie their socks with elastic; if you had these kind of marks, they would kill you. There were already nine dead bodies lying on the ground.

As we proceeded further into town we bumped into a group of ex Mobutu soldiers. They stole all our money. I had to give them all the savings I had taken with me when I fled – five hundred and thirty-five US dollars. Then they started to point their guns at us, wanting to kill us. Fortunately one of the soldiers recognised us – we had taken care of him at Bukavu hospital. He intervened, and we escaped.

Administrator ?

When Kabila's forces managed to enter Goma, the population didn't flee immediately from town. We thought the bursts of gunfire wouldn't force us to leave – besides, the radio was broadcasting a message of hope, telling us not to leave Goma. Many people rallied to help out Mobutu's soldiers, bringing down fields of banana trees to improve the visibility; the population was hostile to the Tutsis' incursion to



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annex the Kivus. I saw with my own eyes how a Rwandan – or maybe an Ugandan – soldier was tortured by a group of young people; with a machete they cut his whole leg off, put the dying man on a sedan chair and stuck a cigarette between his lips and joyfully marched all over Goma. The same day or maybe the day after, Goma fell into the hands of Kabila. That day there was a lot of shooting, and around noon, the population started to flee towards the west. In theory, we were not allowed to leave Goma; I told my family that I wanted us to stay at home. Many people were passing by in front of our house. Heavy weapons were crackling; the young people, and also the refugees, had just obtained weapons at the military camp. Many young people who didn't have any military formation fell that day. I even know of a young boy who was hit by a bullet and is still buried in his brother's plot.

Goma fell at around one o'clock in the afternoon. I managed to keep my family at home until three o'clock; then, my wife said she couldn't stand it anymore. She said she wanted to leave the house and go to my brother's house, in the west of Goma; I refused, but she still packed her things and took the five children with her. The youngest was only two years old. My seven year old son wanted to stay with me, but I told him he had to be with his mother and his brothers. When they left, I retreated in the house and prayed for them. I told God, if ever these people were to die, please preserve the life of my son whom I refused to have with me – and that is effectively what happened.

My wife and the children arrived in Sake where all the people from Goma had sought refuge. Many people were trying to escape from there, because they knew what had happened in Goma in 1994 with the overcrowding; my family took a truck towards the north, together with more than 650 persons divided up in five trucks – they never reached their destination. On the road, they were arrested by a group of Interahamwe, who burnt all the trucks. Less than fifty people survived.

By miracle, my seven year-old son escaped death; through the thick smoke coming from the burning trucks and the dead bodies, he was able sneak away to the bush, following a young man whom we knew. This man was carrying his baby hit by a bullet in the leg – his wife had just been killed. Soon after, the young man abandoned the baby who was about to die, and took care of my son. This happened on the 7th of November 1996; my son came back to me on the 5th of December. He had a sore on his foot, because he had walked on a big thorn. His clothes were covered with blood in the front.

My son has been very affected by this event; psychologically he is not the same anymore. He often thinks of his mother and his brothers. He even tried to commit suicide in April 2002 – he is 13 years old.

By miracle, my seven year-old son escaped death; through the thick smoke he was able sneak away

Nurse aid ?

I was in Goma when the war broke out, and like many people I fled to Sake, 30 km west of Goma. From there, I climbed on a truck to drive up north; there were five trucks in total, full of people. We were attacked on the road – when the shooting started, I was the first one to jump out of the truck. I spent three days in the bush; almost all the others were massacred. There were friends and relatives of mine among the victims.

One and a half month later, I joined the team of first aid workers who were in charge of burying the victims. We would put chlorine on the already rotten bodies to disinfect them, and then we would dig holes into which we would throw the cadavers. There were approximately twenty of us doing that; it took us one week.

One week after the Rwandan military came back, dug up the dead bodies and burnt them.