

Nairobi, Kenya
Tuesday, July 19, 1994

Representative Tony Hall
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Tony,

Brian Atwood asked me to drop you a note on our visit yesterday to assess the refugee situation in Goma and Bukavu, Zaire. Brian also had an hour-long visit with the President of Burundi which he can fill you in on later. We travelled via ICRC plane, and went with two of AID's DART team members and reporters from the Washington Post and the Christian Science Monitor, as well as AID Press Officer Jay Byrne.

The situation in Goma staggers both the imagination and our descriptive abilities. I am sure you have seen the film, so I won't waste your time describing what 1.2 million people look like. I have not seen anything like it in three decades of this work. We have no reason to doubt the estimated size of the influx, and the French military took us on a helicopter tour, so we had a very good view.

Most refugees seem to have brought some food with them, and livestock, and virtually everyone was head-carrying yellow plastic jerry cans of water. This is very lucky, because the international assistance community there is overwhelmed. No camps have been set up; virtually no food has yet arrived. The food USAID helped ICRC preposition - food we thought would last one month - is almost gone. At present, the ICRC is doing almost the only food distribution. The airport has neither unloading nor warehouse facilities - while we were there, one 707 of relief goods was being unloaded by hand - an eight-hour job. There are almost no trucks to move the food once it is unloaded. The one road from the airport to the future camp sites, although paved and in good condition, is 2 lanes wide and clogged with a tide of refugees moving north. This is a logistics nightmare.

The situation is immensely unstable. Among the 1.2 million in Goma are large segments of the Rwandan Government Forces, still armed, still in uniform, and still moving around in an apparently organized and disciplined fashion. They have neither disbanded nor tried to disappear into the civilian crowd. Radio Mille Collines is still broadcasting messages to flee or be killed. The Zaire military is adding to the terror, and incidences of looting and harassment of refugees are increasing.

This is a true complex emergency, with grave political, as well as humanitarian, dangers. There is a history of bloodshed between the Hutu and the ethnic groups in that part of Zaire. Should the refugees be pushed farther into Zaire, or should there be significant additional flows, or should the RGF forces decide

to use Zaire as a base, the security of the entire region will be placed in extreme jeopardy.

~~Finally, in our judgement, there is no effective leadership in Goma or in Nairobi to galvanize and focus the relief work and to coordinate resources.~~ We met with UNHCR/Geneva representative Eric Morse this morning, and he is preparing a proposal that UNHCR coordinate logistics through a multi-lateral air cell like their very successful one in former Yugoslavia. We strongly support that, but urge that other UN independent agencies increase their presence here.

We believe there are a number of other steps which must be taken quickly, and Brian will be briefing President Clinton on this on Thursday.

-The cease fire is welcome, but the new Rwanda government must create an atmosphere of welcome and of safety to induce refugees to return. They should broadcast such a message by radio and, more importantly, they must release the people they have been holding in camps inside Rwanda immediately.

-Peacekeepers must be widely and rapidly deployed in Rwanda, to ensure the continuing safety of all Rwandans and to encourage the return of those who have fled.

-Western nations need to respond positively to the UNHCR request for a logistics air cell. We are sending a demarche cable from Nairobi to US Embassies in donor nations conveying the US position and requesting their support to UNHCR.

-Pressure has to be brought on the UN system to recognize and respond to the magnitude of this crisis.

This is a situation unlike any we have seen in our lifetime, and requires full and coordinated response of the world community. We know you will continue to play a major role in mobilizing that response, and we are very grateful to you.

Cheers, and best wishes

Nan Borton

