



Native Rwandans, from left, John Ndusha, Francois Utazirubanda, Emmanuel Ruranga, and Antoine Uwimana meet weekly in Rochester to discuss the changing events in their war-torn homeland.

S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

## Area Rwandans

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photograph of the three of them brightens the wall of his uncle's apartment, where he lives.

On April 6 Uwimana had called home and let the phone ring for five minutes. His brother-in-law finally answered, explaining that the family was hiding near the house. Uwimana's wife came to the phone crying and also told him not to call at night. They were seeing weapons fire everywhere.

Since February Uwimana and his neighbors had guards patrolling the neighborhood with only bows and arrows. Uwimana had one guarding his house from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Grenades were going off anytime, anywhere. "At the beginning we were very frightened, but since then we have seen many people dying."

A wealthy businessman neighbor had hired nine guards. Militia or bandits grenaded the man's house to rob him, and the nine were seriously wounded. "We took them to the hospital." He said, shaking his head, "That was the first time I saw so many wounded."

Stranded later in Washington, he was depressed. "Normally I am very optimistic. But since you hear your friends, cousins, relatives are dying every day — people say (a) half million to one million people have died — you wonder if it is important to live or not, to be a Rwandan or not. It is very difficult."

Like the others, he diligently watches TV coverage for a familiar face. While in Washington, he was surprised to see one on the screen. His aunt, a woman religious, was among a group evacuated by French soldiers and flown by helicopter to Goma. He saw her hugging others. He said, "I remember she had some tears."

In Rochester, he can laugh and cry with friends. The four men also have begun, with community support, a Rwandan Relief Committee to pool funds through the American Red Cross. Emmanuel Ruranga, 33, raised in Uganda



AP/Wide World Photos

A French soldier cradles an orphaned Rwandan infant he had rescued from the tens of thousands of sick and exhausted refugees.

after leaving Rwanda, already is thinking of returning at least temporarily to help rebuild. A clinical therapist at Rochester Mental Health Center, he has a master's degree from St. Bonaventure University.

The new government seems to be sharing its power and is encouraging people to call themselves Rwandans first, he said. "So there is great hope for Rwanda now." If the government can keep everybody satisfied and safe, given the "incredible activity" by foreigners there, he said, it will be a good sign.

The four men are among the small percentage of educated Rwandans. In Rwanda until 1983, Utazirubanda taught education and psychology at the National University of Rwanda. He has a master's degree from the Catholic University of Louvain, where he said the government sent him to study. Today he is in a doctoral program at the University of Rochester, and works as a parking attendant.

Now, he said, instead of teaching the upper class and the educated, he would teach the peasants (about 92 percent of the population). "Those who are educated, who have money, are the people who betrayed the Rwandan people. What makes me sad is to see those people dying. Imagine those people, hmmm? They don't know how to read or write. All they care about is their land,

and cultivating crops. I identify myself with them, those peasants who don't know what is going on."

"I would tell the majority, we don't need war or fighting. We need democracy. We need to elect our leaders."

Neither did the Catholic Church reach the people, he said, saying his refugee priest friend now in Montreal, who lost 50 relatives in the war, agrees. Priests were seen as wealthy, as associating with the rich and powerful. "So there needs to be a lot of explaining," he said.

Utazirubanda has stopped practicing his own Catholicism and says he is "still searching." While not abandoning his faith, he will not call himself a Christian because, he said, "to say you are Christian is to say you are perfect. You work toward it, hmmm? It's an idea. I put a question mark after it. How many 'Christians' commit atrocities like in Rwanda? These people wear crosses and rosaries and ask for protection for themselves while they kill."

Ruranga, raised an Episcopalian but comfortable in any church, added that during the Rwandan fighting, "People who worked as ushers told people they'd be safe in the church, but then went to tell whoever was killing where they were. At the same time there are wonderful Roman Catholic people who put their lives on the line to save hundreds."

"From a spiritual sense, I think people right now will need a more simple basic teaching of the word of God. It's kind of like you have to win them back. A lot of people don't want to go back to the church. People will have to send missionaries and support. They must find ways of incorporating fundamental values of human life."

Even Uwimana is ready to return, perhaps after an economics studies program through the World Bank in France. "I have to return so we can talk about the situation and avoid it in the future."

"If my wife is dead, probably they took my daughter to an orphanage in Tanzania or somewhere. Maybe 20 years from now I will find her. So there is a reason to go."



AP/Wide World Photos

Rwandan refugees pause on their way back home from Goma's teeming camps. Relief agencies are continuing to step-up efforts to convince refugees it's safe to return home.

## Crisis

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Goma ... where tens of thousands of Rwandan refugees already have died from disease, hunger and thirst," the CRS official said.

"Unlike Goma, however, this region hasn't attracted widespread media coverage," Martin said.

She said people in Gikongoro are dying daily from malaria, diarrhea and other diseases.

Conditions are expected to get worse during the rainy season, which could begin as soon as September.

"The rains will make roads impassable," she said. "Many of the hillsides — already stripped of vegetation by displaced people seeking firewood — will turn to mud. "When that happens, many of the huts that now dot the hillsides will be swept away," she said, "leaving their occupants at the mercy of the elements."

The CRS country representative in Rwanda, Chris Hennemeyer, said that "the odds working against us in Rwanda are incredible."

But he added that "there is a strong sense of commitment and confidence" among the aid agencies working there.

"We're hopeful that over the coming months ... we will continue to see progress in the stability of this country," Hennemeyer said.

In a related matter, Pope John Paul II has given \$250,000 for emergency assistance to Rwandans displaced by the civil war in the country or living in refugee camps in bordering nations.

The Vatican announced Aug. 8 that the pope "wanted to offer a concrete sign of his closeness to the people hardest hit" by the war, lack of food and outbreak of disease.

The money, which will be distributed through the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum," the Vatican's aid coordinating agency, will go to refugees and displaced in Rwanda, Zaire, Tanzania, Burundi, Kenya and Uganda, the announcement said.