

2 Africa Leaders Die, U.N. Says; Rocket May Have Downed Plane

By Paul Lewis

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The Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, two small and troubled Central African countries, were killed today in a plane crash, United Nations officials said. Rwandan diplomats said the plane had been hit by gunfire or a rocket as it approached the airport at Kigali, the capital of Rwanda.

The deaths of the two Presidents, Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi, were first announced by radio stations in the two countries, then by the French Embassy in Kigali, United Nations officials said.

The two men were returning from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where they and other African leaders had met in an attempt to end the ethnic warfare that has recently devastated Rwanda and Burundi. Fighting between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes in each country has left thousands dead, and hundreds of thousands of refugees have fled in recent months.

[Heavy fighting broke out around the presidential palace in Rwanda on Thursday, hours after news of the deaths of the two presidents spread, Reuters reported residents as saying. The news agency said that explosions rocked Kigali but added that residents could not immediately tell who was fighting whom.]

The Defense Ministry said in a statement that the assassin who shot down the presidential plane was still unidentified. At the United Nations, Rwanda's representative, Jean Damascene Bizimana, said the plane had been hit by a rocket. "It was not an accident," he said. "It was an assassination. There was rocket fire at the plane. The plane was brought down as it was landing, and the two Presidents were killed."

He added that the plane had caught fire as it hit the ground and that there were no survivors.

The French Embassy in Kigali said that there were 10 people aboard the plane, and that none had survived.

Mr. Bizimana called the death of the two Presidents a tragedy because it came at a critical moment as both countries were trying to end ethnic violence and civil war. U.N. Force in Rwanda

"For both of us it's a tragedy for many reasons," he said, "because we are at the beginning of our peace process. And in Burundi the situation is very difficult. We both count very much on the support of the international community and the United Nations."

Mr. Bizimana said that "enemies of peace" were responsible for the assassination but that it was too soon to know for certain who was involved.

This month's Security Council president, Colin Keating of New Zealand, appealed for calm in Rwanda and Burundi and called upon their people to refrain from any further violence. He also extended the Council's condolences to the families of the two men.

The United Nations recently deployed a 2,500-member peacekeeping force in Rwanda to try to stabilize the country and restore order, but it has so far rejected appeals for a similar force to be sent to Burundi.

At the Dar es Salaam meeting, President Ali Hassan Mwinyi of Tanzania had pleaded for an end to the months of violent tribal conflict in Rwanda and Burundi between the Hutu, who are the majority tribe in both countries, and the rival Tutsi minority. Both the dead Presidents were Hutu.

"Now is the time to say 'no' to a Bosnia on our doorstep," Mr. Mwinyi had told the two Presidents. "Now is the time to insure that hostilities are not passed on to the children of Rwanda and Burundi."

The meeting was the latest foray in a diplomatic offensive by President Mwinyi, who is also trying to put together an African peacekeeping force in Burundi. The United States has suspended its \$16 million aid program to Burundi. Burundi Leader Assassinated

The situation in Burundi, which like Rwanda was once a Belgian colony, has deteriorated sharply since last October, when its previous President, Melchior Ndadaye, and several members of his Cabinet were assassinated during a short-lived military coup.

Relief agencies have estimated that as many as 100,000 people may have been killed in wave after wave of tribal fighting between Hutu and Tutsi. The Tutsi, who make up some 14 percent of Burundi's population, have long dominated the army and the Government, as they have in Rwanda.

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