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RWANDA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR TOUGH ACTION TO
PREVENT FURTHER KILLINGS BY THE RWANDESE ARMY

NEW YORK: Amnesty International deplores the massacre of at least 110 people in Kanama in north west Rwanda in the night of 11-12 September 1995.

"The Rwandese government should take immediate action to prevent further extrajudicial executions by the Rwandese Patriotic Army," the human rights organization said.

The 110 or more people were killed when soldiers of the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) reportedly opened fire on villagers in Kanama, near the border with Zaïre. The majority of the victims were women and children. The RPA shootings were apparently in reprisal for an ambush by Hutu militia who attacked a group of RPA soldiers, killing one lieutenant.

The killings occurred in the same week that Amnesty International released a new report, which presents a set of recommendations to the international community to prevent further human rights violations in Rwanda and Burundi.

Amnesty International welcomed statements made by the Rwandese Vice-President and Minister of Defence Paul Kagame on 13 September in which he is reported to have regretted the killings in Kanama, acknowledged that the RPA had used excessive force and promised that the perpetrators would be brought to justice. Amnesty International also welcomed the speed with which an inquiry has been set up by UN agencies and the Rwandese authorities. The organization asked Rwandese and UN officials to ensure that the inquiry conforms to international standards and that its results are made public.

However, the organization reminded the authorities that an inquiry in itself is not sufficient and must be followed up with the implementation of specific recommendations for preventing further extrajudicial executions.

"As a minimum, the Rwandese Government should make clear to all RPA officials that deliberate, arbitrary or indiscriminate killings of unarmed civilians are grave violations of human rights and will not be tolerated," Amnesty International said.

Over the last year, Amnesty International has appealed to the Rwandese Government on many occasions to put an end to the pattern of extrajudicial executions committed by or with the complicity of the RPA. The government has announced investigations into some of these killings but none of their findings have been published and no one has yet been brought to justice.

The killings in Kanama on 11-12 September constitute the single largest massacre by the RPA since the killing of several thousand people at the internally displaced persons' camp at Kibeho on 22 April. The international inquiry into the killings at Kibeho failed to conform to UN standards; furthermore the Rwandese Government has still not announced the findings of its own inquiry into the Kibeho killings.

The organization has also condemned human rights abuses by armed Hutu groups operating from Zaïre, including deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians. In recent months there has been an increase in cross-border incursions by armed Rwandese Hutu from Zaïre into Rwanda.

At the present time when tensions at the Rwanda-Zaïre border are particularly high and Zaïre has demanded the repatriation of all Rwandese refugees by 31 December 1995, it is all the more important for the Rwandese authorities to be seen to be taking action to protect human rights.

"The killings at Kanama this week could further discourage Rwandese refugees from voluntarily returning from Zaïre to Rwanda and play into the hands of Hutu extremists who want to prevent the return of refugees," Amnesty International said.

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